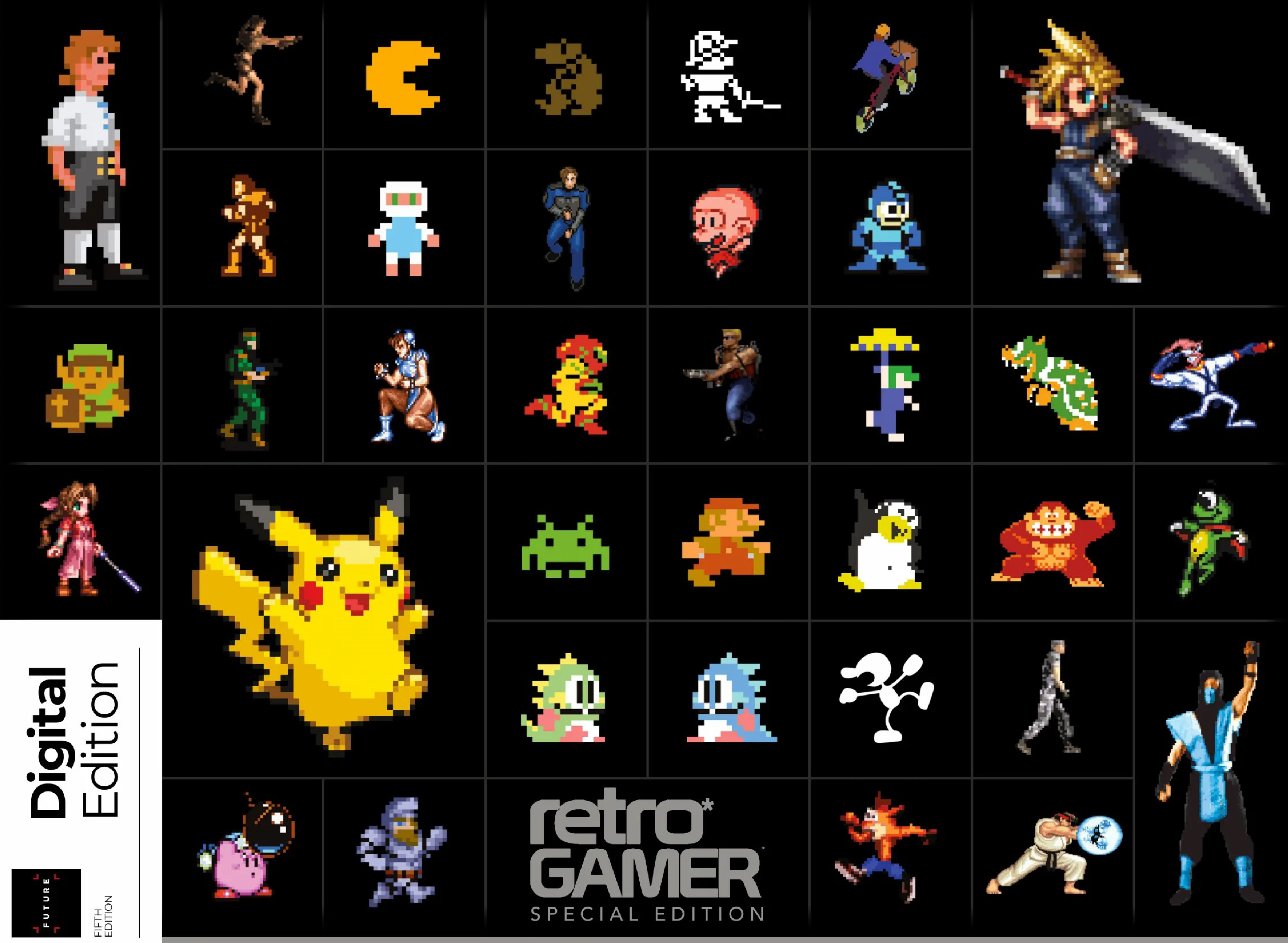
NEW

GREATEST GAMING ICONS

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE GAMING HEROES AND VILLAINS



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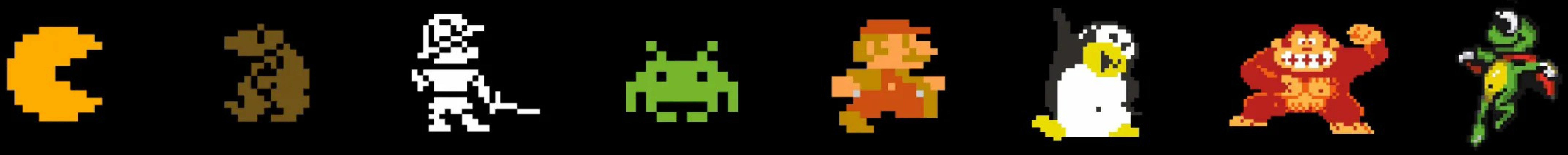


WELCOME TO

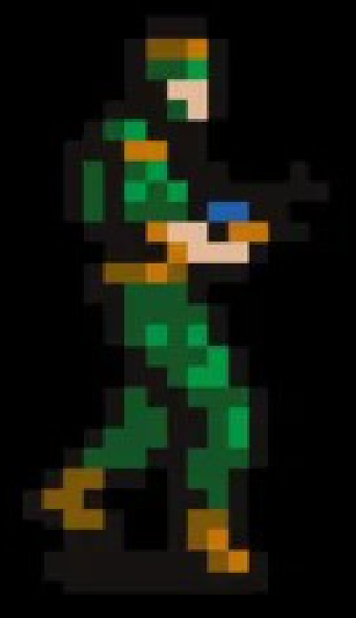
GREATEST GAMING ICONS

It's amazing to think that in the space of four decades, the videogame industry has become one of the biggest on the planet. Nowadays, games are made by hundreds of people and can cost millions to make, but in the early days things were very different. Many games were born in the bedrooms of school kids all around the world, who were just tinkering away with the new computers, while others were made by small teams who realised that there was money to be made in this emerging new market.

Keen businessmen and sharp developers quickly cottoned on to the fact that their games did a lot better when they had identifiable characters at their core, and throughout the Eighties and Nineties numerous videogame heroes (and heroines) were born. Some would have a few hits and fade into obscurity, while others would regularly turn up in long-running franchises and earn firm fan bases or become the mascots of companies. And then, of course, there are the likes of Sonic, Mario, Lara Croft and Pac-Man, huge characters who are recognised by gamers and non-gamers alike and have become huge celebrities in their own right.

The following book will look at 50 of these colourful characters and either chart their origins or revisit their first game appearances. Some have now faded, while others are stronger than ever, but each and every one of them had a part in shaping the industry we appreciate today.

Enjoy the book.



FUTURE

GREATEST GAMING ICONS

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» GREATEST GAMING ICONS

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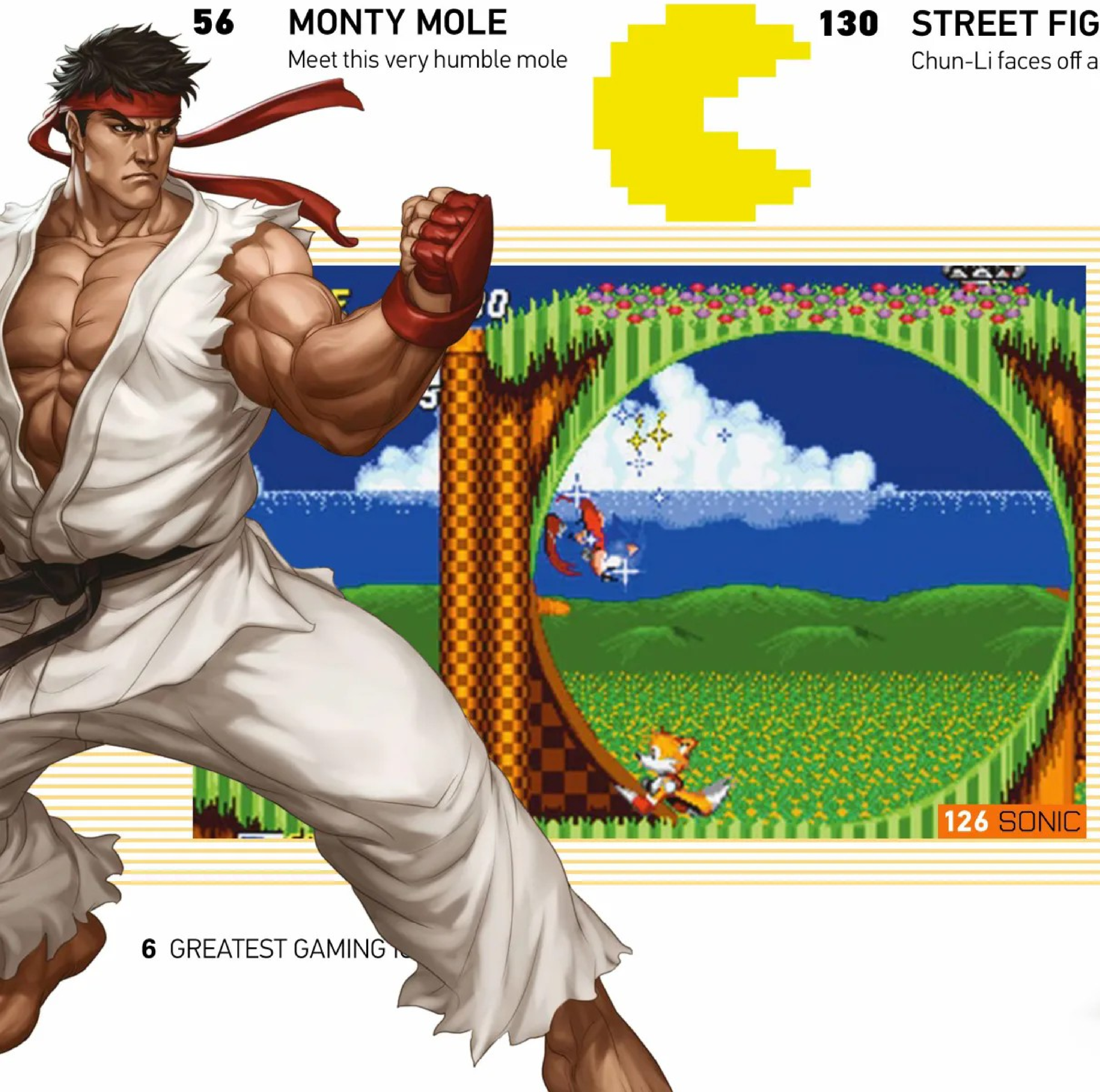

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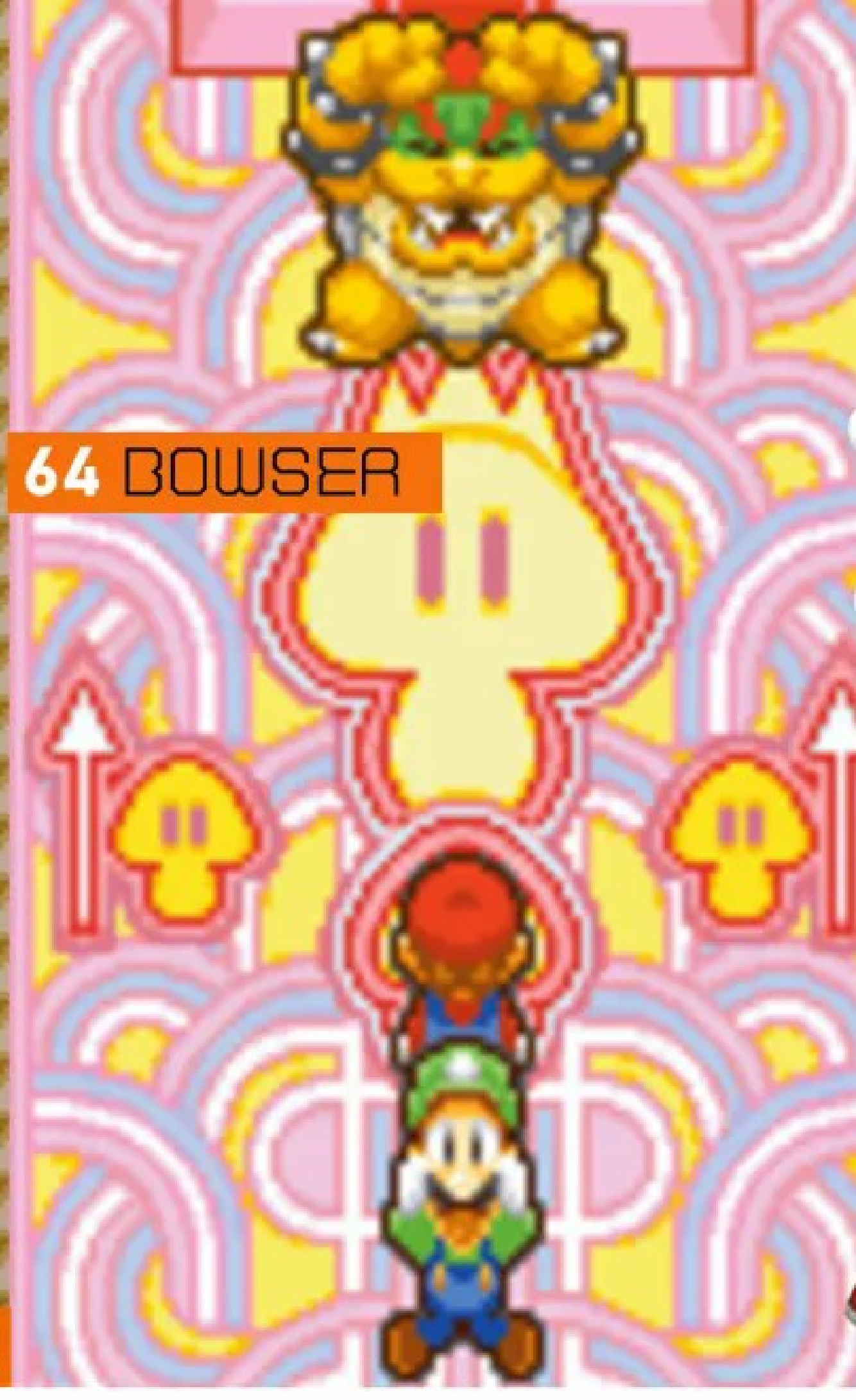
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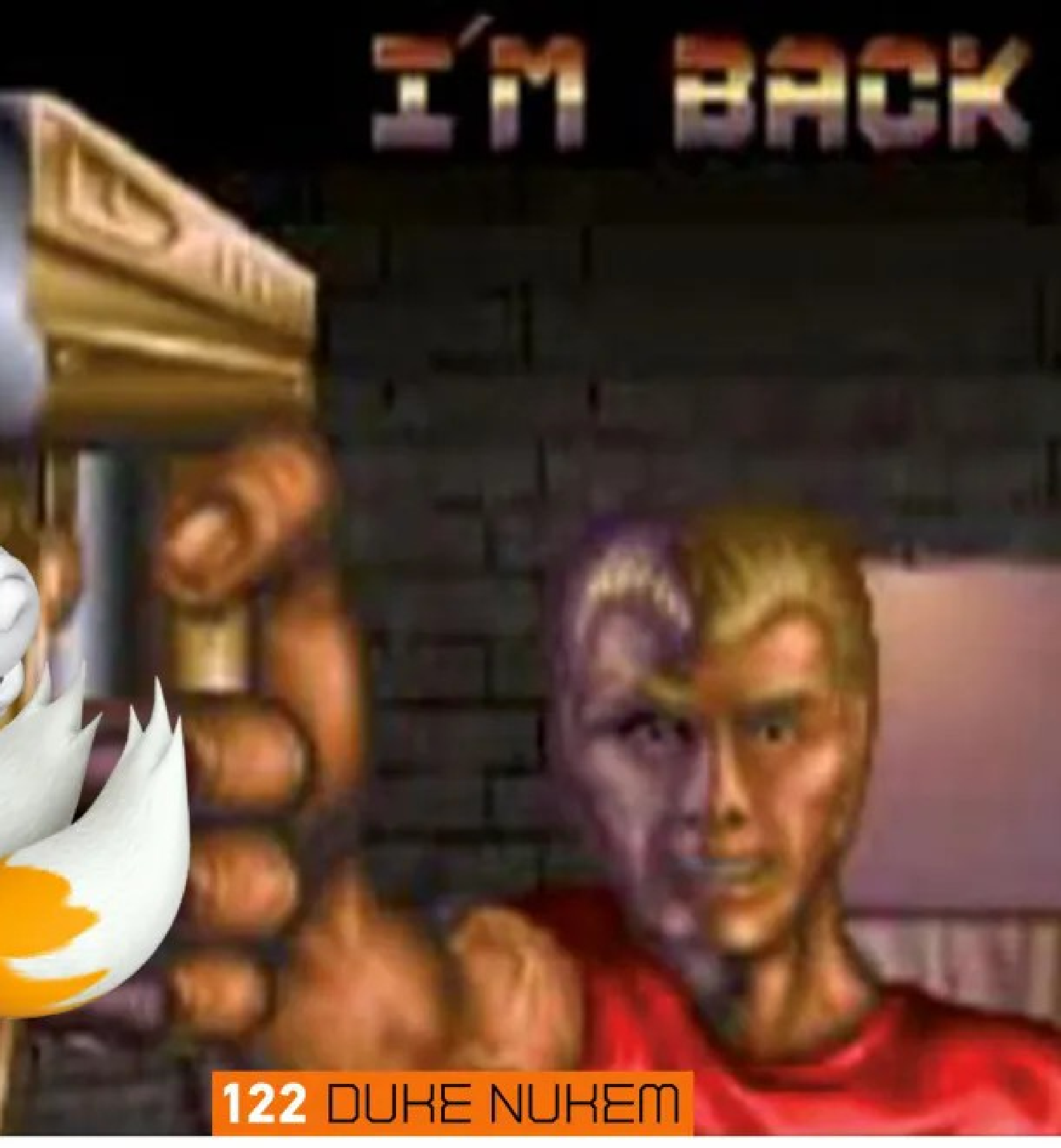

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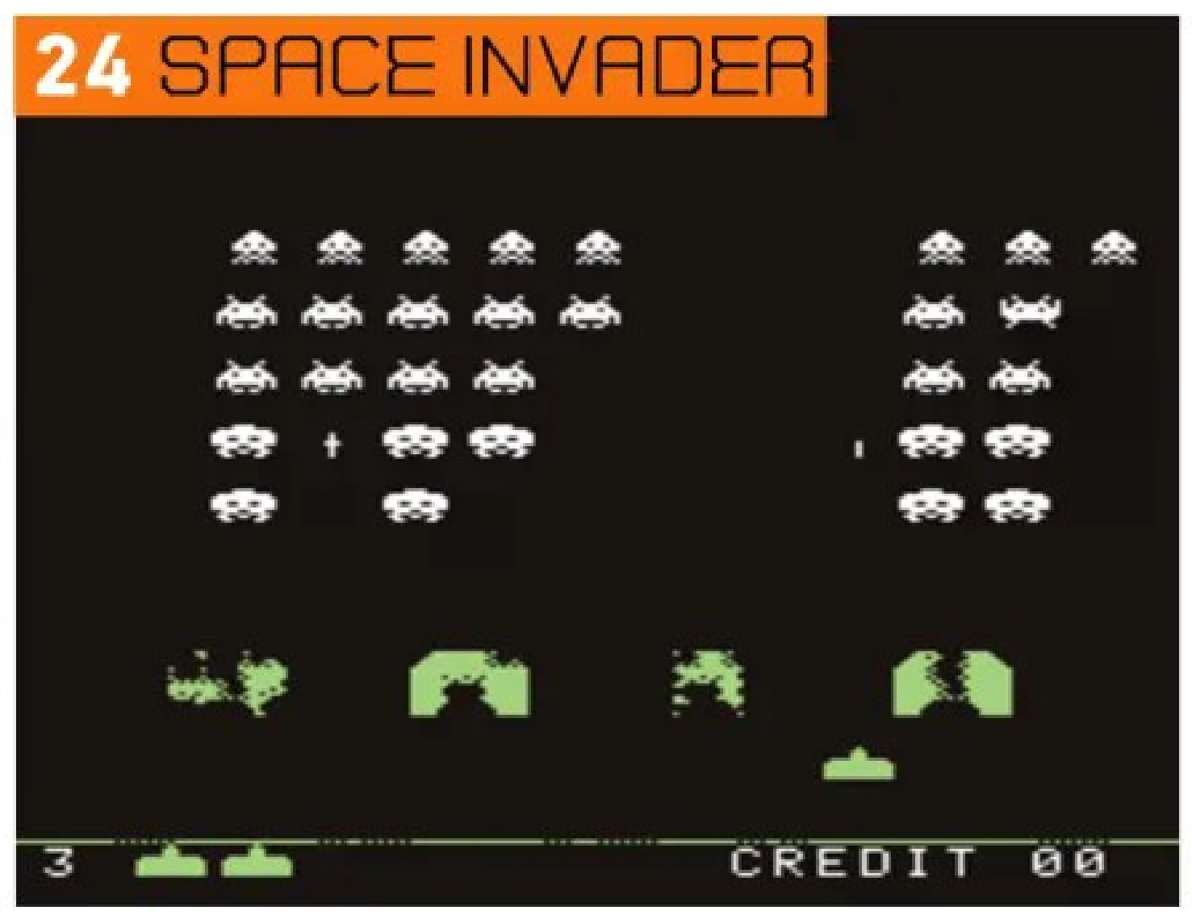

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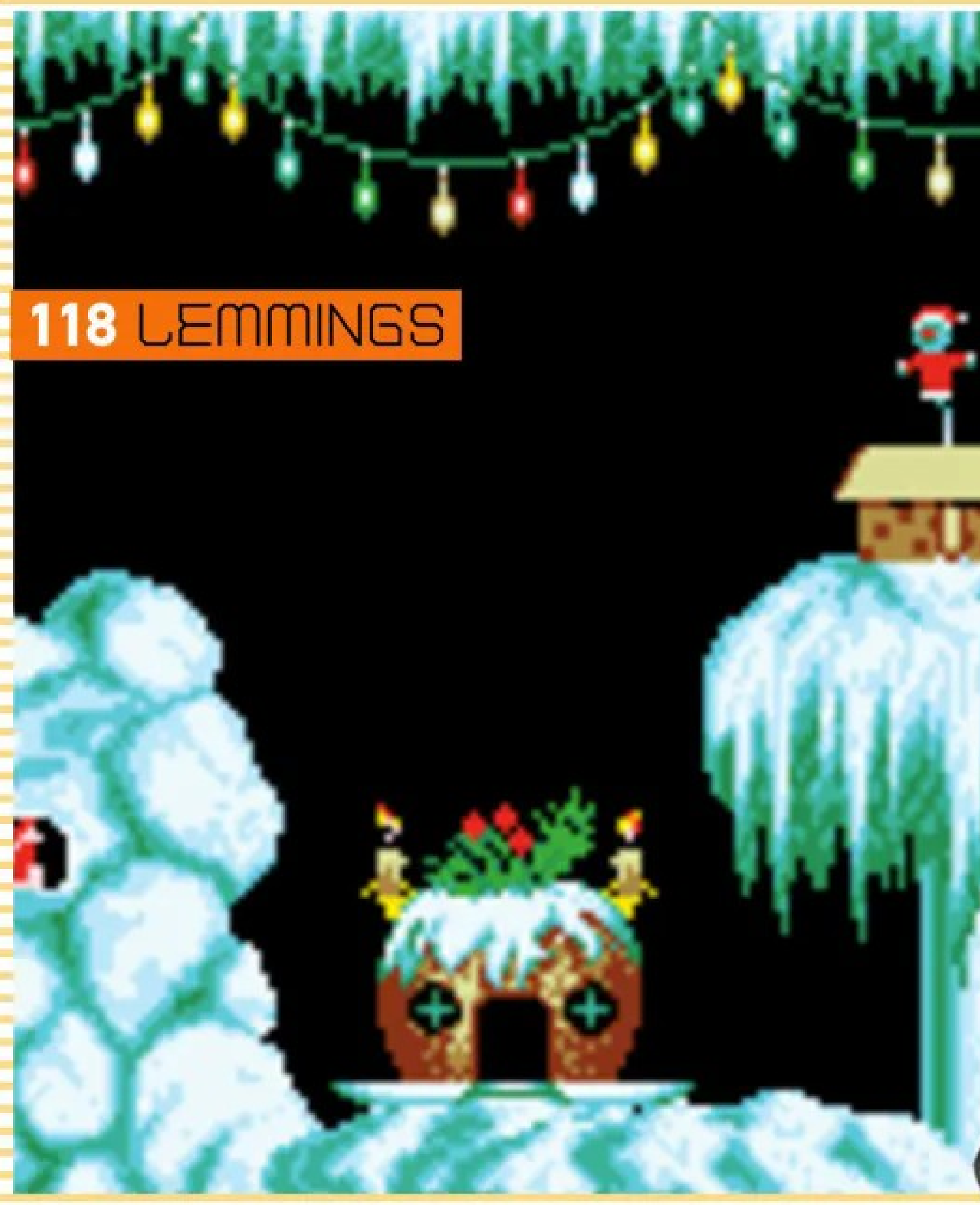
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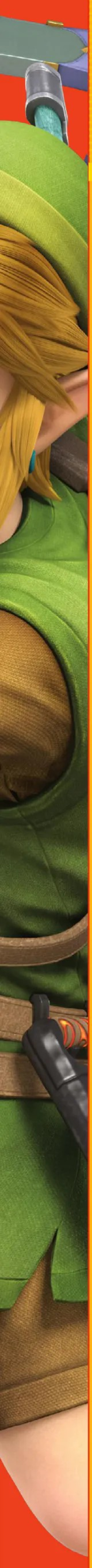
50 GAMING ICONS

Your brief guide to the bold designs and brilliant personalities that have grown videogames from a niche hobby into an industry worth over £100 billion

Over the decades, videogames have given us some of the most memorable and beloved characters in the world. In less than 50 years, we've gone from two straight bats and a ball to virtual personalities of such high profile that they rival Hollywood stars and famous athletes for recognition and success. Gaming is truly mainstream now, and its icons are everywhere – they're in the cinema, they're on your t-shirts and sometimes they're even selling you products. If you're an old hand in the gaming world, this is the kind of situation you could well have dreamed of, but it's the reality we all live in now.

Those iconic characters come in all forms. They range from the simplistic sprites of the Space Invaders to modern heroes like Nathan Drake, who take whole teams years to bring to life.

They include multi-million selling superstars like Mario to cult heroes like Monty Mole, who mean just as much to those who were there for their glory days. Over the coming pages you'll meet 50 true icons of gaming – in no particular order, just so we're clear – and learn about the creative histories, design decisions and key games that propelled them to a permanent place in the annals of videogame history.

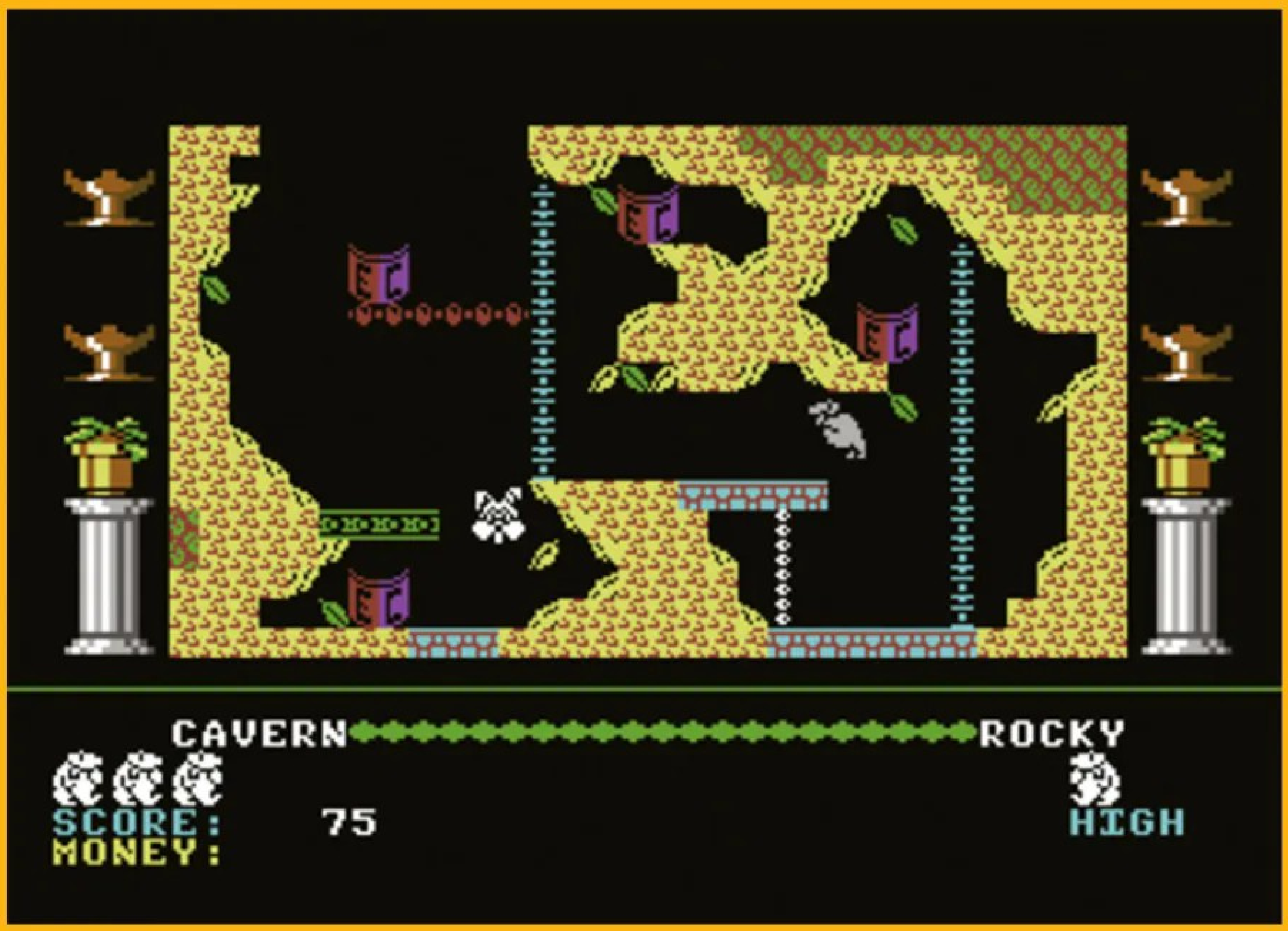


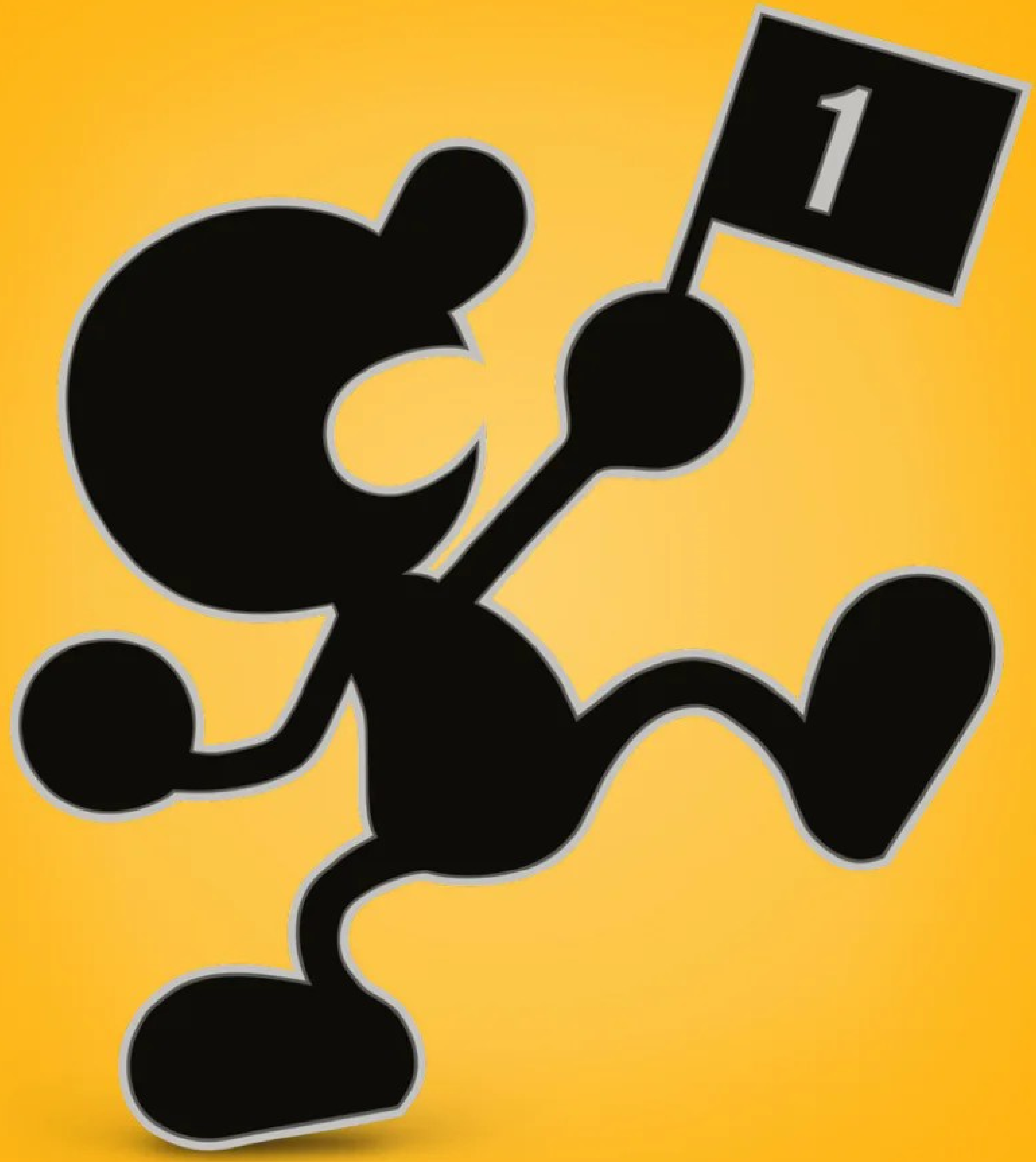
TAILS

01 **Yasushi Yamaguchi was the artist who created Sonic's loyal and ever-present sidekick, but he was never happy with the name – so everyone refers to him by his nickname, but his actual name is Miles Prower.** Tails was created specifically to allow for multiplayer to be added to *Sonic 2*, and the way he followed Sonic around when not under the control of a player was so unique that it was actually patented by Sega.

MONTY MOLE

02 **Some heroes can only come from a specific place and time, and working class hero Monty Mole is very definitely a product of Eighties England, with his first game released during a major miners' strike.** Monty is a miner and finds himself trying to collect coal to keep his family warm, but quickly runs afoul of the authorities. Over the course of the series, he flees to the safety of Europe.



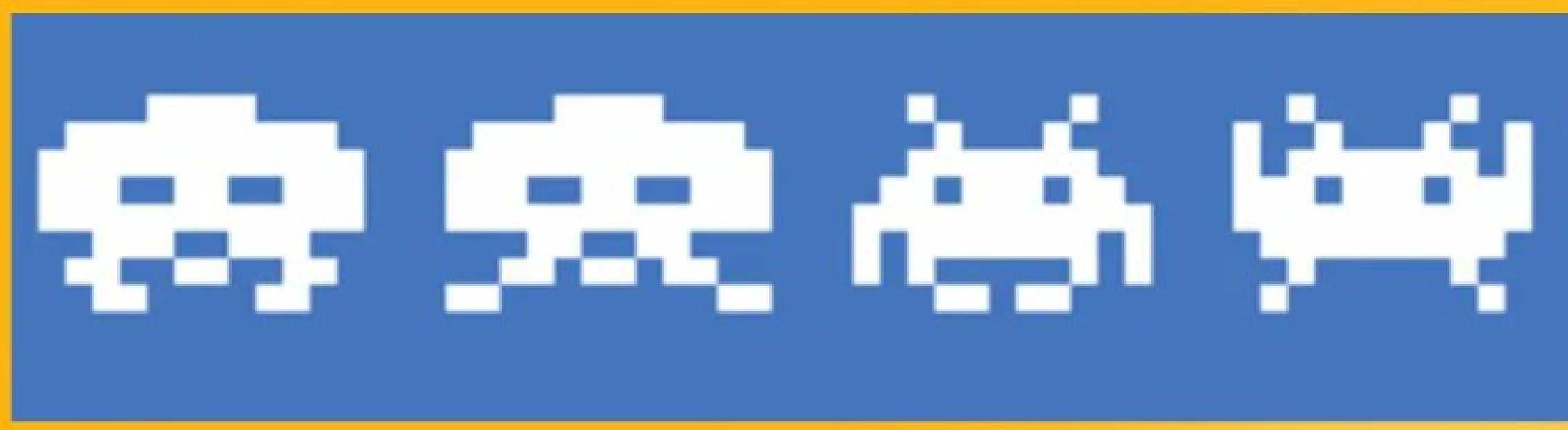


MR GAME & WATCH

03 **This hero isn't distinguished by what he does, so much as where he does it.** Mr Game & Watch has few distinguishing features and turns his hand to everything from fire rescue to cooking, but he does so exclusively on the popular LCD handheld game range – or at least he did, until Nintendo decided to revive him for *Super Smash Bros*.

SPACE INVADERS

04 **Maybe it says a lot about gamers that the first characters we really elevated to iconic status were villains.** But the invaders had real *character* – their distinct types, the way they animated as they moved across the screen, and the sound of their relentless march towards the ground. The arcade game became a phenomenon and the invaders themselves became a visual shorthand for videogames as a whole – which is probably why they still look identical in modern appearances, despite 40 years of technological progress.

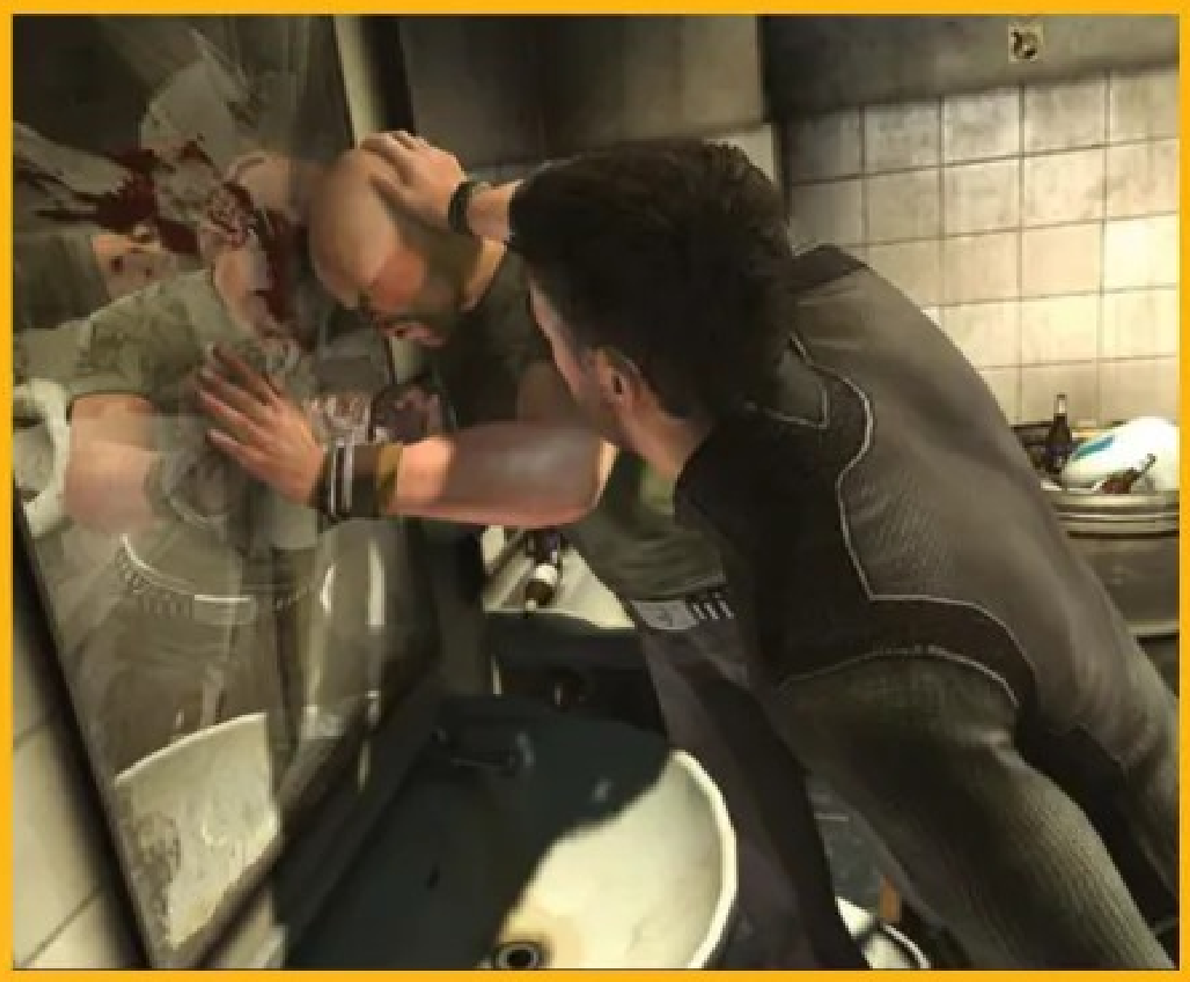


JOANNA DARK

05 **James Bond is always a tough act to follow, but Rare's *Perfect Dark* managed to succeed its own *GoldenEye 007* and introduce a beloved character in the process.** Inspired by the likes of Dana Scully and the titular character of *La Femme Nikita*, the development team chose to focus on Joanna Dark's skill as a secret agent over her looks. Despite having few starring roles, Joanna is particularly memorable for her part in launching the Xbox 360, which was accompanied to market by *Perfect Dark Zero*. Identical in modern appearances, despite 40 years of technological progress.

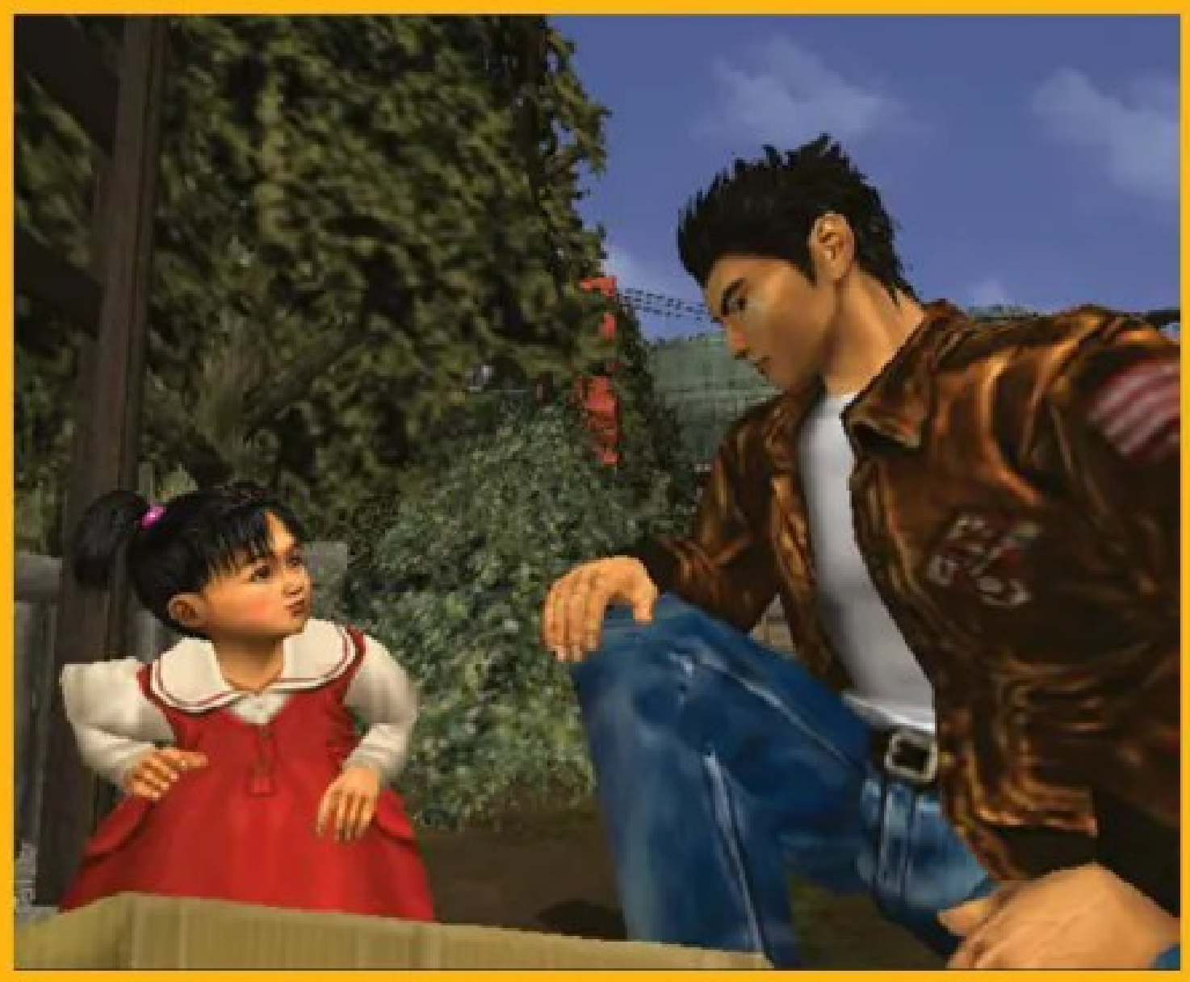
SAM FISHER

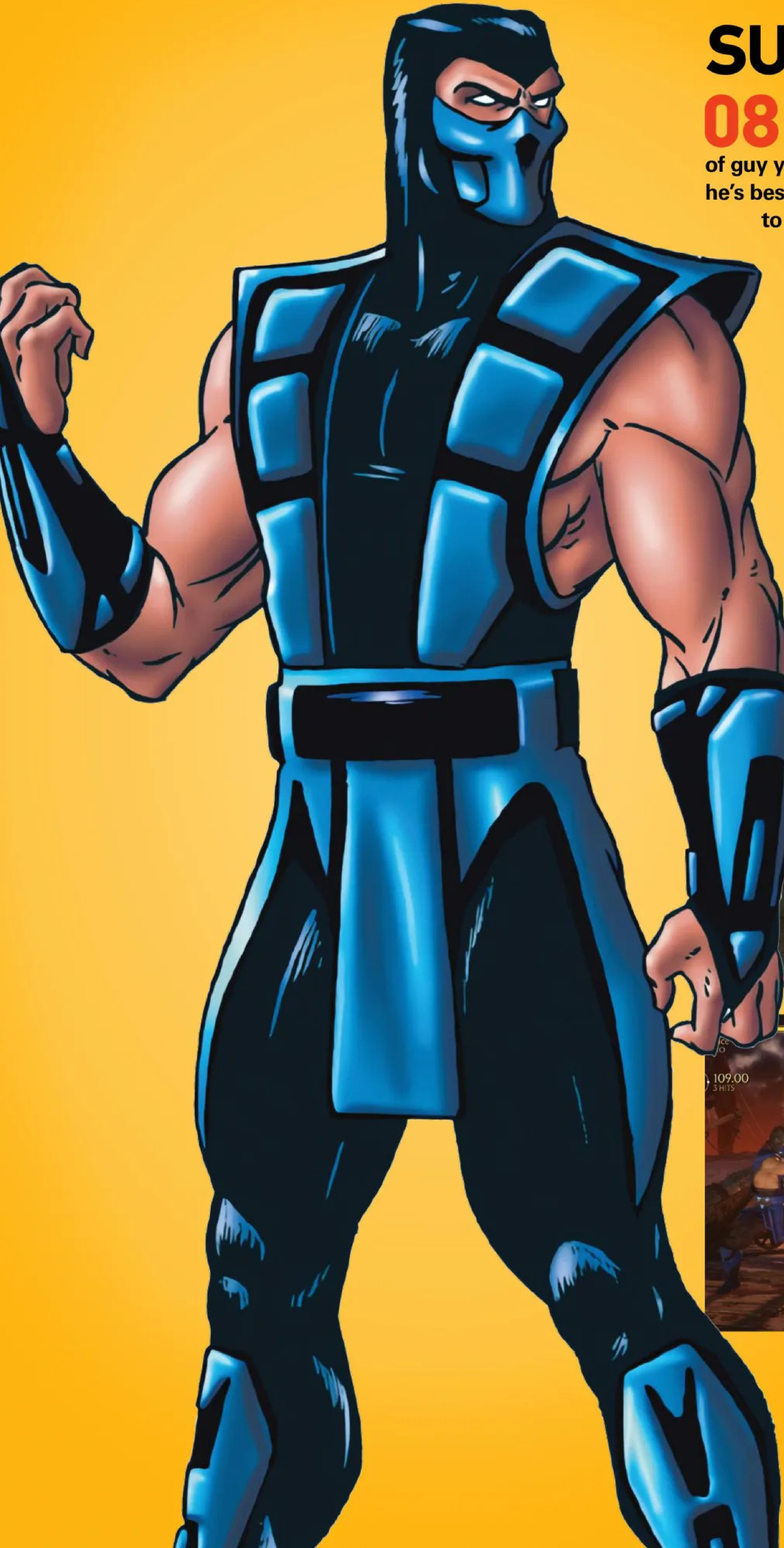
06 If you see a triangular formation of green lights emerge from the shadows, forget running – you've already lost. Whenever you see the night vision goggles of *Splinter Cell*'s Sam Fisher, you know you're in for a stealth extravaganza. But Fisher himself has changed a lot over the years, and that's what makes him the most interesting of the *Tom Clancy* game characters. When we initially meet him, he's slightly cynical but professional to a fault, and one who wholeheartedly believes in his mission, but by *Splinter Cell: Conviction* he's a different man – one who revels in the violence that he engages in, as he interrogates his targets in highly entertaining sequences.



RYO HAZUKI

07 When you see the star of *Shenmue* for the first time, you might notice a resemblance to fellow Sega martial artist Akira Yuki – that's because the game was a *Virtua Fighter* RPG in its original concept. This eventually turned into an original story, in which Ryo sets out for revenge after seeing his father murdered by Lan Di. Ryo is a man of few words whose naivety and bluntness can often land him in unfavourable situations, and his single-minded focus on his quest ensures that he's often oblivious to the affections of others. But his games were groundbreaking open-world adventures, and many Dreamcast owners past and present still long to see his story's conclusion.

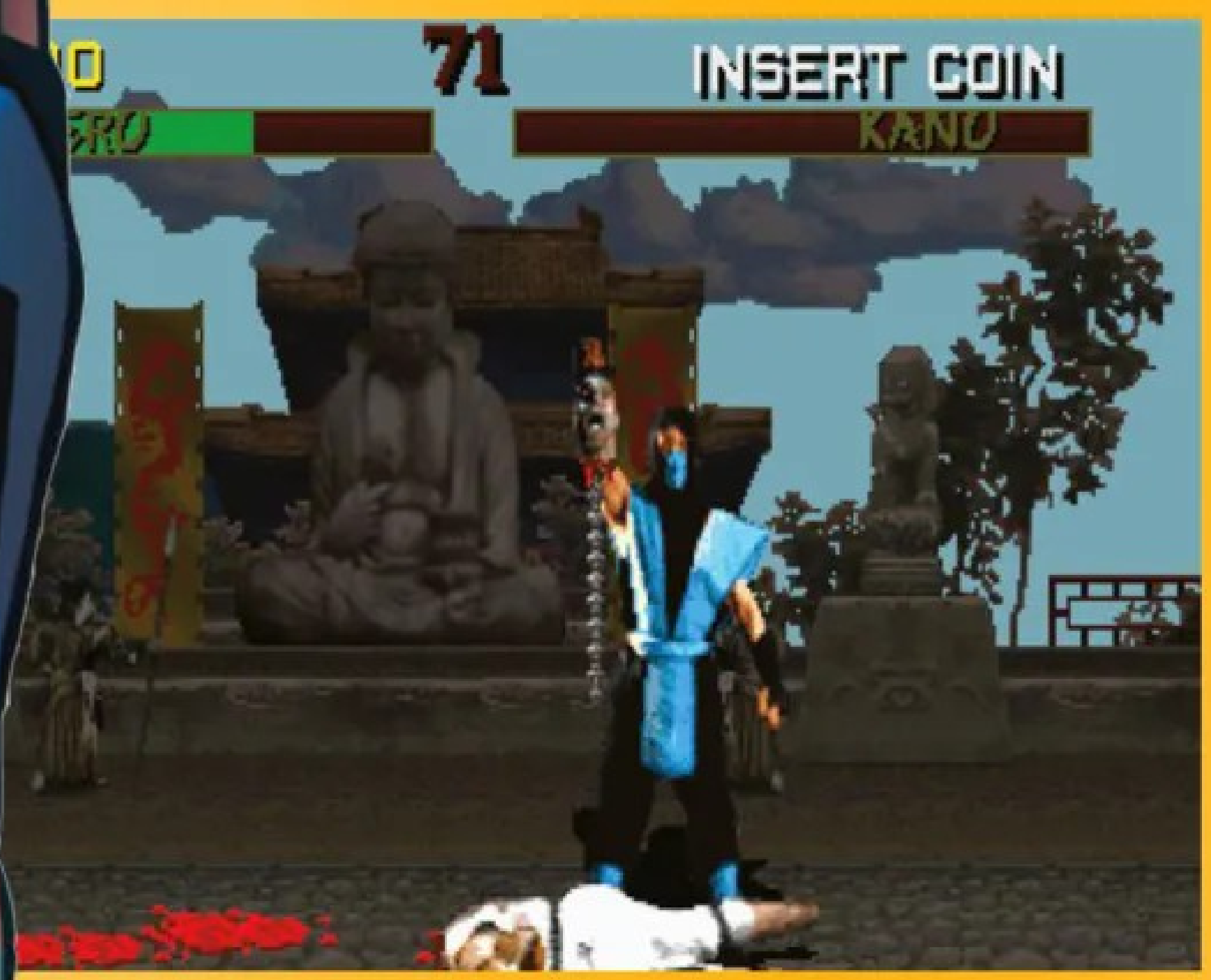




SUB-ZERO

08 This *Mortal Kombat* assassin might be cool (get it?) but he isn't the sort of guy you want your kids hanging around, as he's best remembered for his grisly tendency to pull his opponents' heads off with the spine still attached. There are actually two Sub-Zeros, the original Bi-Han and his younger brother Kuai Liang. Together, they've appeared in every main *Mortal Kombat* game. While ninjas are commonly thought of as being a Japanese cultural mainstay, Sub-Zero and the Lin Kuei clan are actually Chinese as John Tobias was inspired by Li Hsing's controversial book *China's Ninja Connection*.

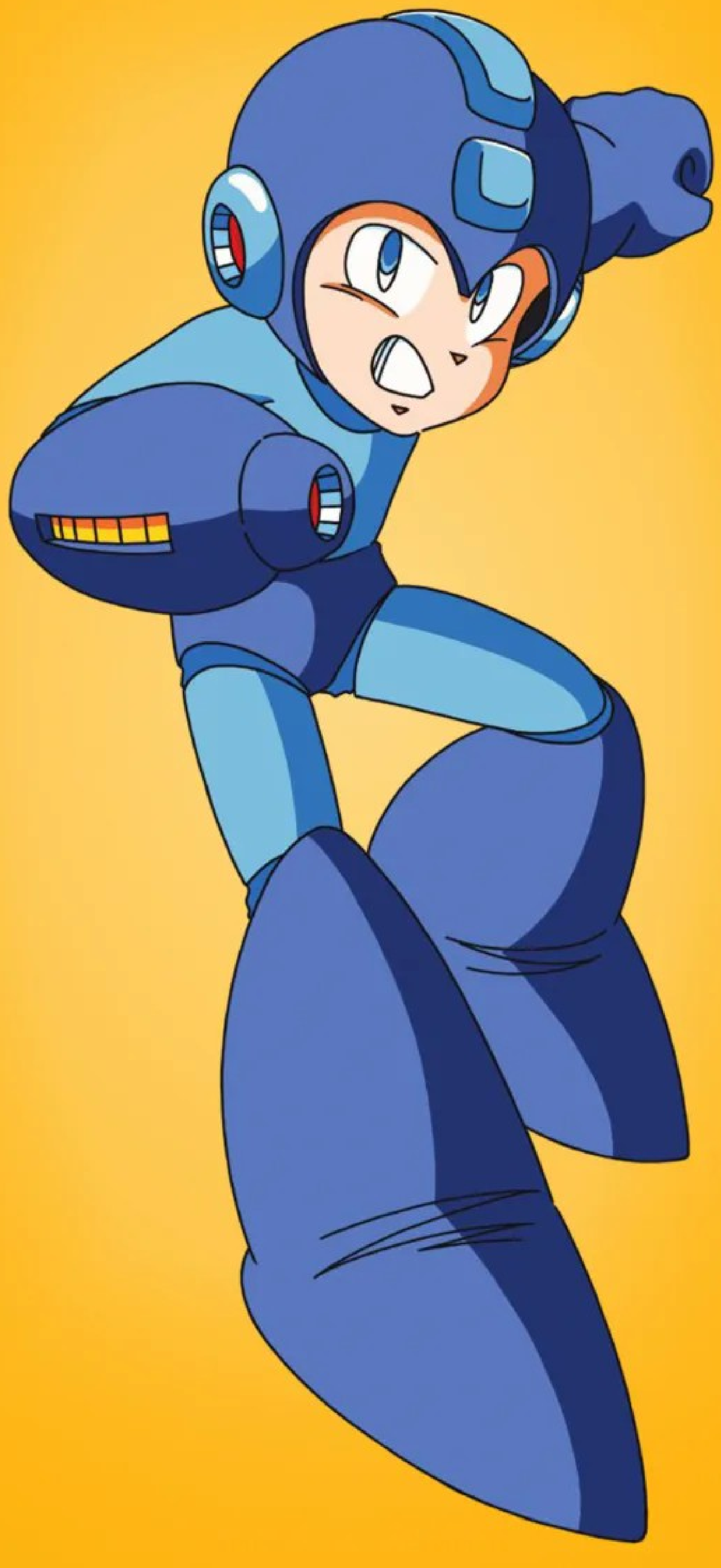
Scorpion, a rival ninja with whom Sub-Zero has a famous blood feud, was given a Japanese background as a contrast.



MEGA MAN

09 Capcom's robotic hero is a prolific chap, having starred in dozens of games since his introduction in the mid-Eighties. Mega Man – or Rockman, to give him his Japanese name – was drawn by Akira Kitamura, but Keiji Inafune would produce illustrations based on this and ultimately became the man most often associated with the character.

The blue bomber got his start on the NES, where he stood out from other platform protagonists thanks to the unique structure of his games. Mega Man could tackle the levels in any order the player desired and gained new weapons after defeating each boss, and tackling stages in the right order could seriously alleviate the considerable challenge of the games. It's these classic games that provide the inspiration for modern adventures like *Mega Man 11*.



NATHAN DRAKE

10 The *Uncharted* series has become one of the most iconic PlayStation franchises, thanks to Naughty Dog's incredible ability to craft cinematic videogame experiences that keep the player in control. And with that big blockbuster feeling comes the need for a high profile star – enter Nathan Drake. Despite being an adventurer who often ends up pursuing historical mysteries, a lifestyle we certainly don't share, he's a hero we can relate to due to his reactions to the situations he finds himself in. When we nail a helicopter with a grenade launcher, he's as likely as we are to drop some triumphant trash talk, and when he narrowly escapes a near-death situation he's likely to crack a joke about the absurdity of his predicament. *Uncharted 4* seems like it may well be Drake's final outing, but he's more than earned a comfortable retirement.

PAC-MAN

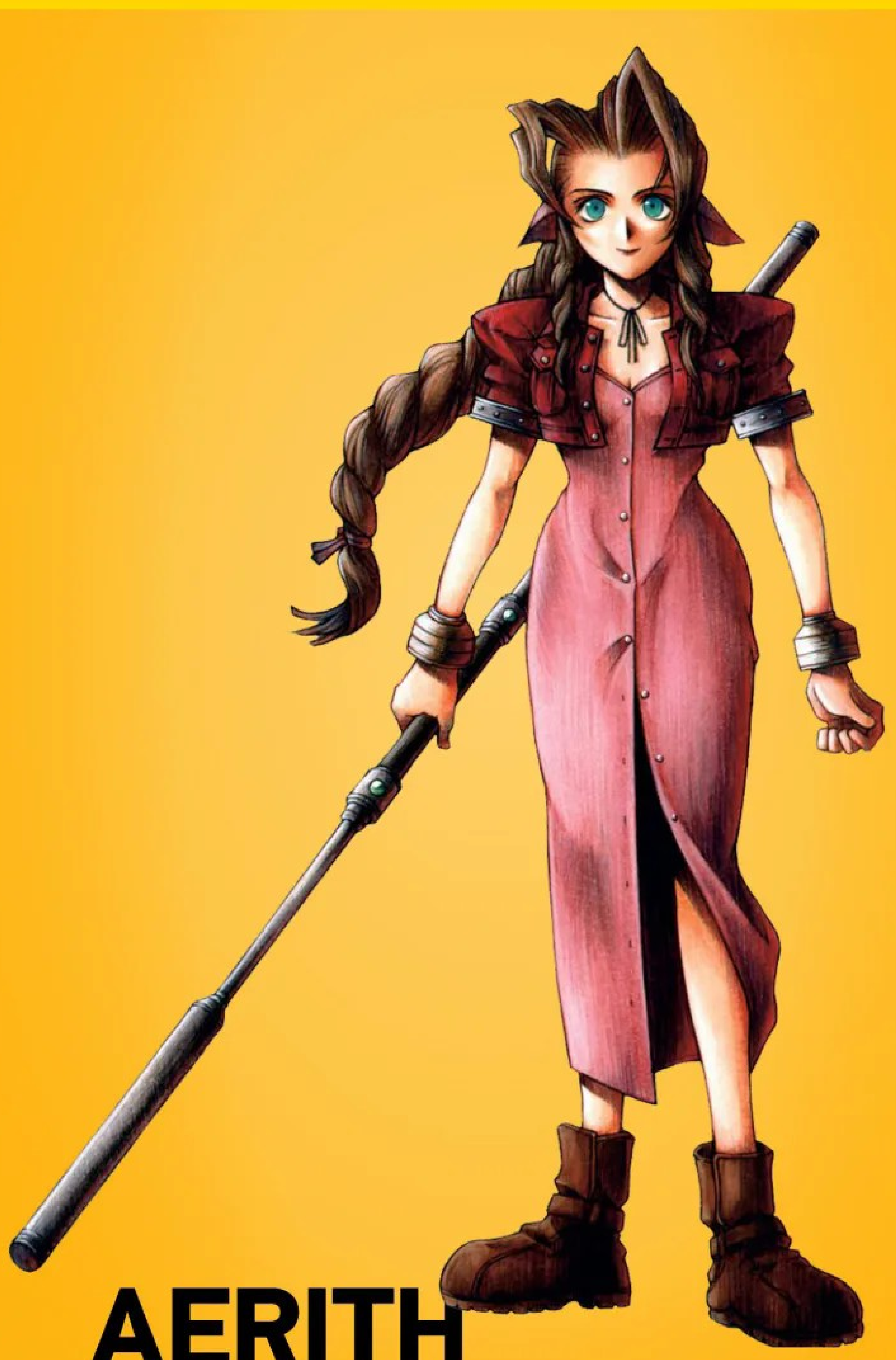
11 One of the very first identifiable characters in gaming quickly became one of its most iconic, as Pac-Man's arcade popularity propelled the character to iconic status.
Pac-Man's name is an onomatopoeia, from the Japanese eating sound *pakku-pakku*, but he was originally called Puck-Man until Namco changed it due to worries over vandalism. The look of the character was inspired by food itself, as the sprite looks like a pizza with a missing slice. Depending on the game, modern depictions tend to either show him as a ball with eyes and a mouth, or else a full 3D version of the cabinet illustration.

Pac-Man's original fame came from maze games, but as the popularity of that genre dwindled, he branched out to a variety of genres – platform games, puzzle games, even kart racing. But with the modern *Pac-Man Championship Edition* series, he's back to his maze game origins and as popular as ever.

LARA CROFT

12 It's amazing to think that if history had turned out a little differently, we might be discussing an Indiana Jones pastiche or the South American adventurer Laura Cruz here. Instead, the star of *Tomb Raider* was designed to reflect her origins – a thoroughly British adventurer, with an aristocratic background that was evident in everything from her massive mansion home to her cut-glass accent. In an era where women were so often damsels in distress or token additions to multi-character games, Core Design set out to make a different type of female character. Lara Croft was capable, quick-witted and unambiguously the headline attraction of her games.

Of course, *Tomb Raider* was a groundbreaking game, too. 3D adventures of such sophistication hadn't existed beforehand, and Lara's realistic movements lent an air of believability to the crypts and caverns she explored. Her debut quest was packed with memorable moments, from her encounter with a tyrannosaurus rex to the unfortunate fate that befalls her should she step on the hand of Midas. Both the game and the character were icons of the late Nineties, and the line of sequels never stopped, so she's still adventuring today.



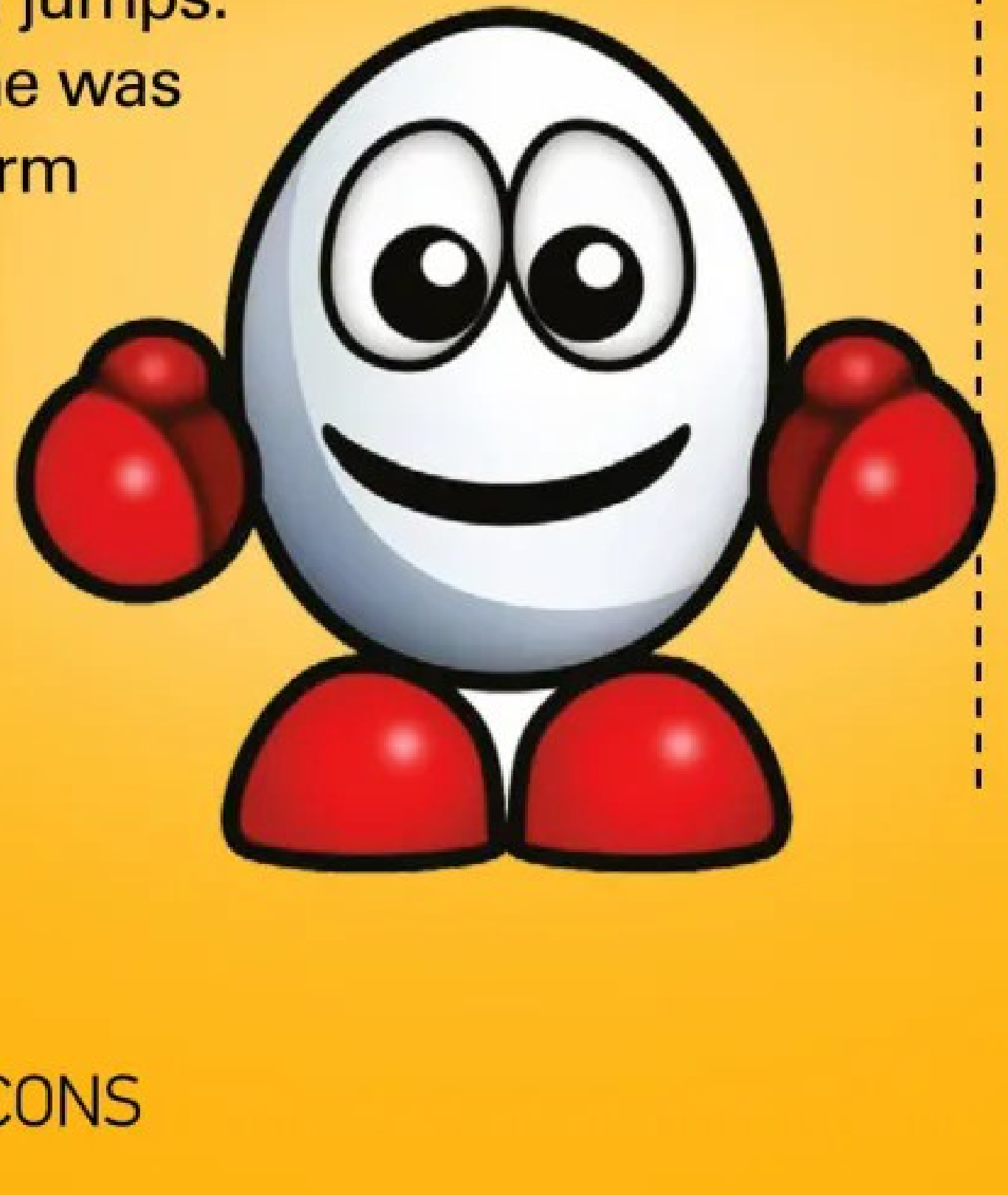
AERITH GAINSBOROUGH

13 **When fans picked up *Final Fantasy VII*, many were charmed by the sweet girl selling flowers in the street.** Aerith is one of Cloud's primary love interests, with her long skirt, ancient origins and strong use of healing magic setting her apart from Tifa's combat-ready appearance and martial arts prowess. But while many of our icons have happy endings, character designer Tetsuya Nomura was determined that Aerith would be a tragic hero. Many players remember Aerith not only for the time they spent with her, but for the emotional gut punch they experienced when they learned her ultimate fate.

DIZZY

14 **Few gaming characters have ever been as prolific as Dizzy, the prince of the Yolkfolk**. Designed by Philip and Andrew Oliver in the late Eighties, Dizzy's defining characteristics were influenced by the technology of the time. His egg-shaped design was chosen as it allowed him to have a large, expressive face on machines with low-resolution graphics, and his simple shape was a way to prevent the character from breaking up as he rotated during jumps.

Dizzy's initial game was a high quality platform adventure. Its sales were only average, but they stayed steady where other games dropped off over time.



SIMON BELMONT

15 **It takes a strong hero to gain fame when pitted against a whole host of classic horror monsters and a villain as well known as Dracula, but *Castlevania*'s Simon Belmont has been lodged in the collective consciousness of players worldwide for over three decades.** Rather than wielding a traditional weapon like a sword or a classic anti-vampire weapon such as a wooden stake, Belmont uses a whip known as the Vampire Killer passed down through his family of vampire hunters. Though he faces strong competition from the likes of Alucard as well as members of his own family including Trevor Belmont and Richter Belmont, it's Simon that remains the most popular protagonist of the series. He's not been active for a while, but still shows up in crossovers like *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*.

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SCORE-005100 TIME 0185 STAGE 02
PLAYER
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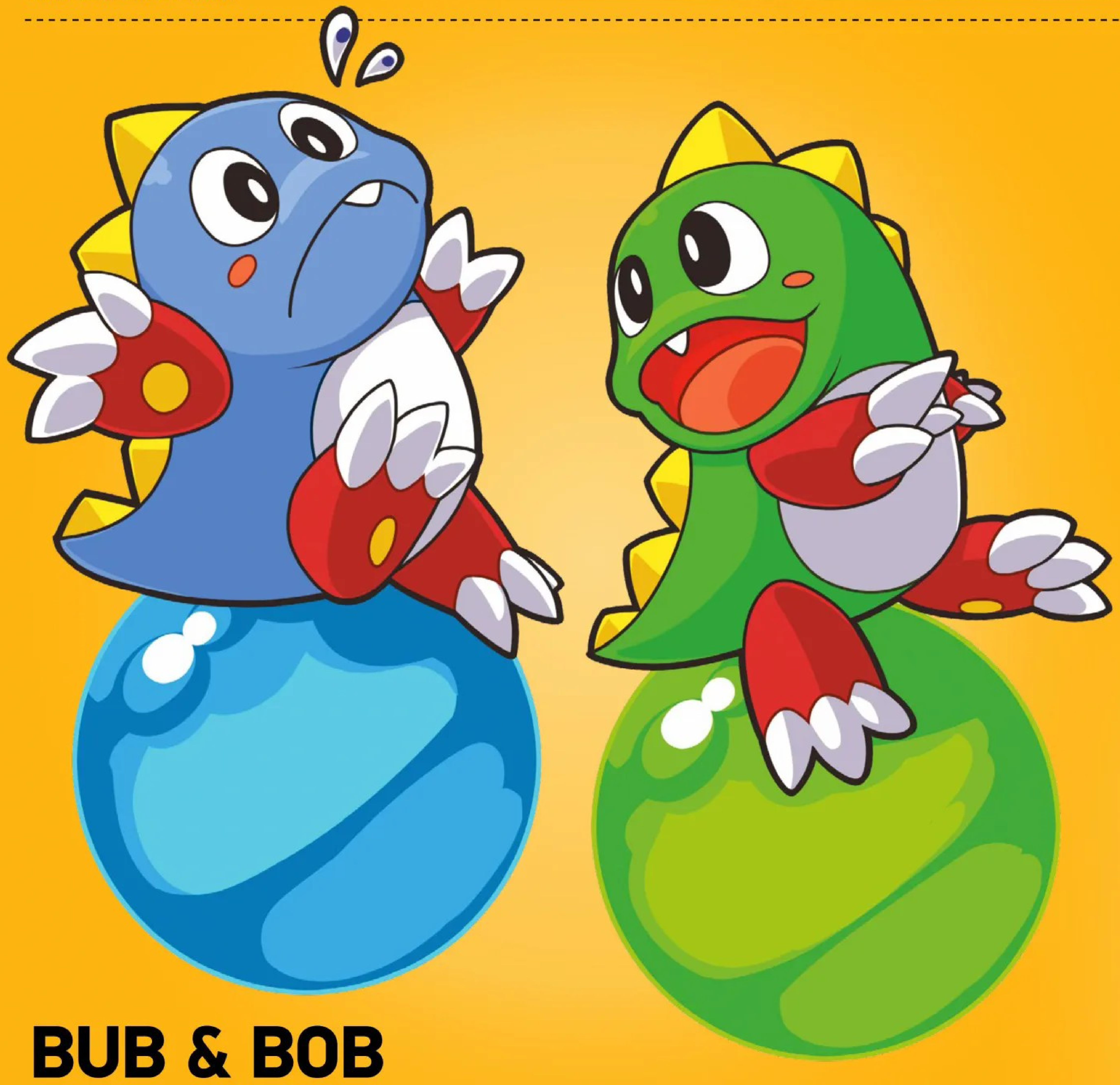
CRASH BANDICOOT

16 Some platform game mascots are fast, some are strong, others still can fly – and all of them are defined by their signature traits. But Naughty Dog didn't want its own animal mascot to be pigeonholed in that way, and instead focused on Crash Bandicoot's attitude, with the idea that he should be mute but clearly fun-loving. You can see that come through in his animations, as his exuberant victory dances and wild facial expressions make it look like Crash is always having the time of his life, whether he's running through the jungle or riding a polar bear. And despite some aspects of his character drifting away over the years (who remembers his girlfriend Tawna?), Crash has maintained those defining traits, ensuring that his legion of fans still follow him.



BUB & BOB

17 Did you know that the stars of *Bubble Bobble* aren't dinosaurs? Their official species is "Bubble Dragon" and that's not even their real identity – they just happen to have been transformed into their current forms by the evil Super Drunk. We're not sure if being cute and having the ability to blow massive bubbles is much of a curse, but the boys do eventually regain their human forms in time for the excellent *Rainbow Islands* and follow-up *Parasol Stars*.

Despite this, they've more commonly been seen in their original designs since, although not usually as platform game stars – despite the brilliance of *Bubble Symphony* and the like, they're now better known as the characters from the *Puzzle Bobble* (or *Bust-A-Move*) series.

FOX MCCLOUD

18 You don't see much of Fox McCloud in his first appearance, as the events of *Star Fox* see him confined to the inside of an Arwing space fighter. Of course, that's a great place for him to be as a skilled pilot, not to mention the leader of the primary force keeping the evil Andross at bay. But the fox in the flight jacket was too cool to remain stuck in the cockpit, and he slowly made his way out of the vehicles and into on-foot situations. As well as his appearances in *Super Smash Bros* games, Fox starred in the action-adventure spin-off *Star Fox Adventures*, and was able to leave the vehicles behind in *Star Fox Assault* too. He last starred in *Star Fox Zero* for the Wii U in 2016.

8
45
1P
ソード
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CP
ブレイドナイト
CP
バーニンレオ

KIRBY

19 Not every icon nails everything on their first try, and Kirby's Game Boy debut doesn't quite convey the character we know today – he's even white on the international box art. But *Kirby's Adventure* for the NES resolved all of that. Artistic miscommunications were avoided, leading to the whole world getting a correctly coloured pink puffball, and game design was revised to address criticism of how easy *Kirby's Dream Land* had been. The solution that HAL Laboratory came up with was to give Kirby the power to copy the abilities of his inhaled foes, making the game more engaging without increasing the difficulty.

The addition of the copy ability went on to define Kirby, making him adaptable from a design perspective and potentially infinitely interesting for players to experiment with.

BONK

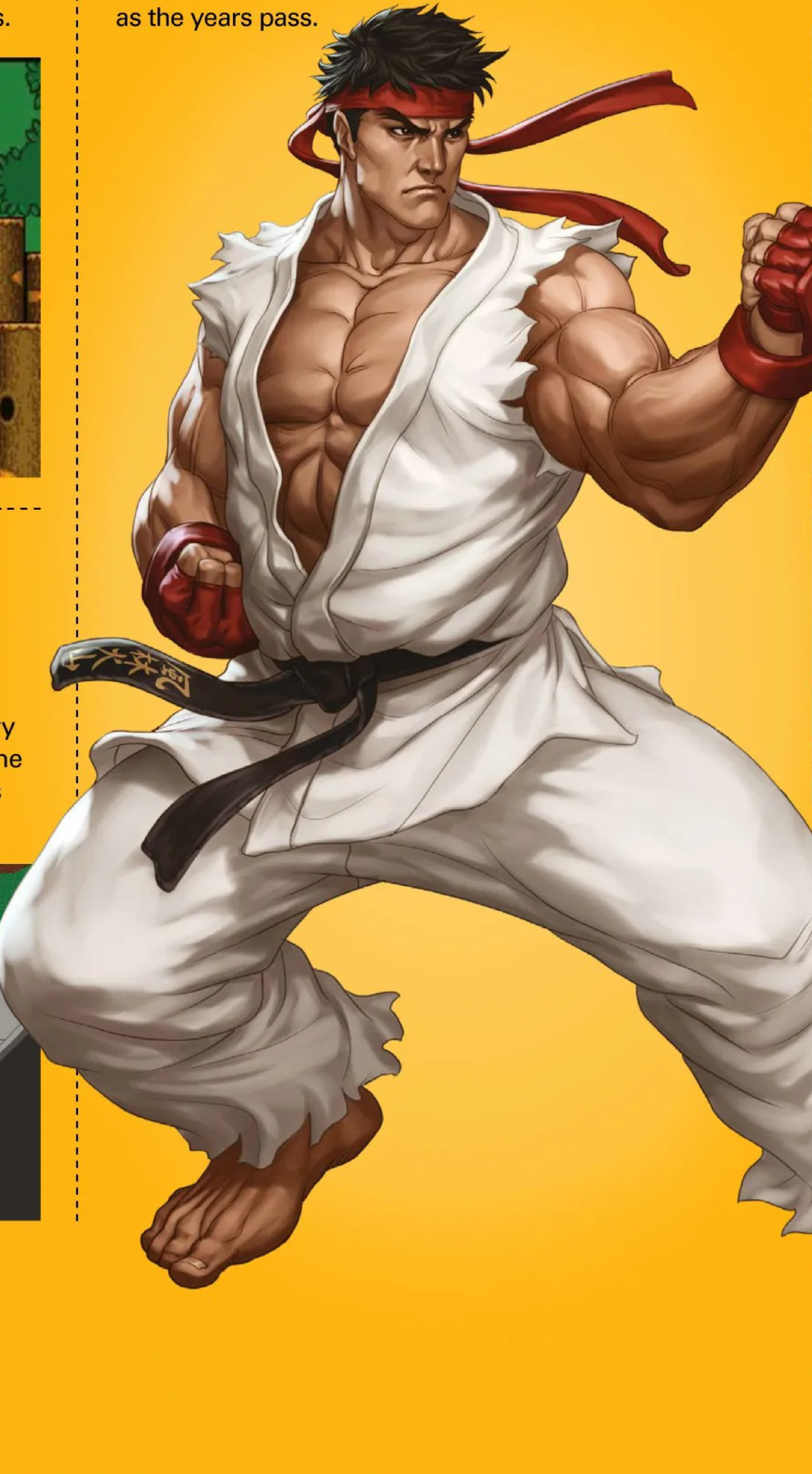
20 This cult hero served as the face of the PC Engine, and in Japan he's known as PC Genjin ("PC Primitive Man"), so his whole caveman design is actually a name pun. As his western name implies, he's fond of using his head to solve problems – with a Glasgow kiss.

PAPERBOY

21 Who needs superpowers when you've got a bike and a stack of newspapers? His vocational arcade game is great because it combines newspaper delivery with all the stuff you wish you could have done on your paper round – mostly lobbing papers through people's front windows.

RYU

22 If we asked you to come up with a fighting game character, you'd probably come up with someone like *Street Fighter*'s Ryu – a Japanese master of martial arts, wearing a karate gi with a black belt. His character design is so plain as to be almost generic, but that was the point. Since the original *Street Fighter* didn't offer a choice of characters, Ryu was designed to be easy to relate to. Since then he's functioned as an anchor for the series, his moves and looks barely changing as the years pass.



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31

ALEX KIDD

23 **Back in the Eighties, this little chap with the monkey features was Sega's mascot – and while he's had a number of adventures across the Master System, Mega Drive and arcade, it's his debut platform game *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* that earned him a permanent place in the hearts of Sega fans.** The game featured incredible variety for a platformer of the mid-Eighties – as well as having plenty of secrets and item shops at regular intervals, the game featured exciting vehicle sections in which you got to use boats, motorbikes and cycle-copters. However, perhaps the most memorable thing about the game was the boss battle system, in which Alex challenged fist-headed freaks to games of rock-paper-scissors.

MARIO

24 **You knew he was going to be here – there's simply no bigger star in the world of videogames.** Mario doesn't fit the traditional mould of a beloved character, as we don't think there's a designer in the world that would have suggested that kids and adults alike would fall in love with a somewhat rotund plumber. But Mario has always stood out from the crowd as a genuinely charming character, whether that's thanks to the moustache he has to separate his nose from his mouth, the brilliant little incidental animations in his 3D games, or the infectiously enthusiastic whoops he (well, voice actor Charles Martinet) makes whenever he jumps.

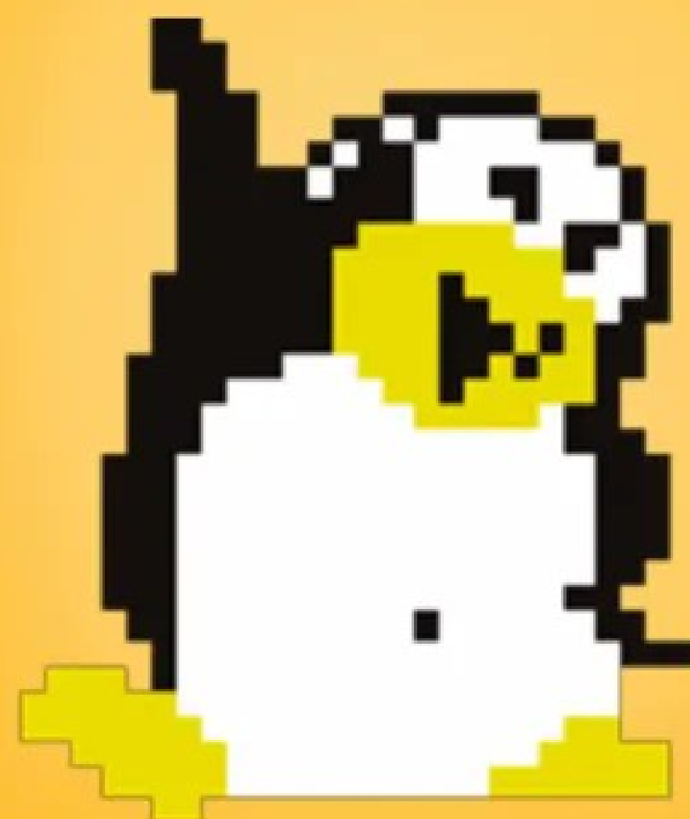
Of course, Mario has been aided by the fact that he often appears in brilliant games. From his debut in *Donkey Kong* to genre-defining classics like *Super Mario World* and modern hits like *Super Mario Odyssey*, Mario has been on top of the platform genre. And that's not all, as Mario has been given a crack at just about every genre gaming has to offer – we wouldn't be doing our jobs if we forgot to mention the karts, his sideline in tennis, and his bizarre board game parties. Put simply, Mario does everything, does it well and doesn't look like he'll be stopping any time soon. Long live the king.

TYRIS FLARE

25 ***Golden Axe*'s resident warrior woman is rather more agile than her male counterparts, but what makes her memorable is her status as the magic specialist of the original trio.** As a skilled pyromancer, she's able to perform the most spectacular attack of the game by summoning an enormous dragon to set the battlefield ablaze. She hasn't always made it into the sequels, but Tyris' status as the most interesting of the *Golden Axe* protagonists saw her make a number of cameo appearances and even led to her getting her own spin-off, *Golden Axe: Beast Rider*.

PENTA

26 Confusingly, many think Penta is the same penguin that appears in most of the *Parodius* games. That's actually Pentarou, Penta's son. Penta himself does show up in *Parodius* on the MSX, but is largely known for starring in *Antarctic Adventure* and *Penguin Adventure*.



SUPERFROG

27 When platform games starring cartoon animals took over the console scene, this speedy amphibian gave Amiga owners their own slice of the action. Team17 was one of the foremost developers of arcade-style action games on the system, so *Superfrog* featured strong game design, colourful graphics and great music. His popularity even earned him a return on HD platforms in 2013.

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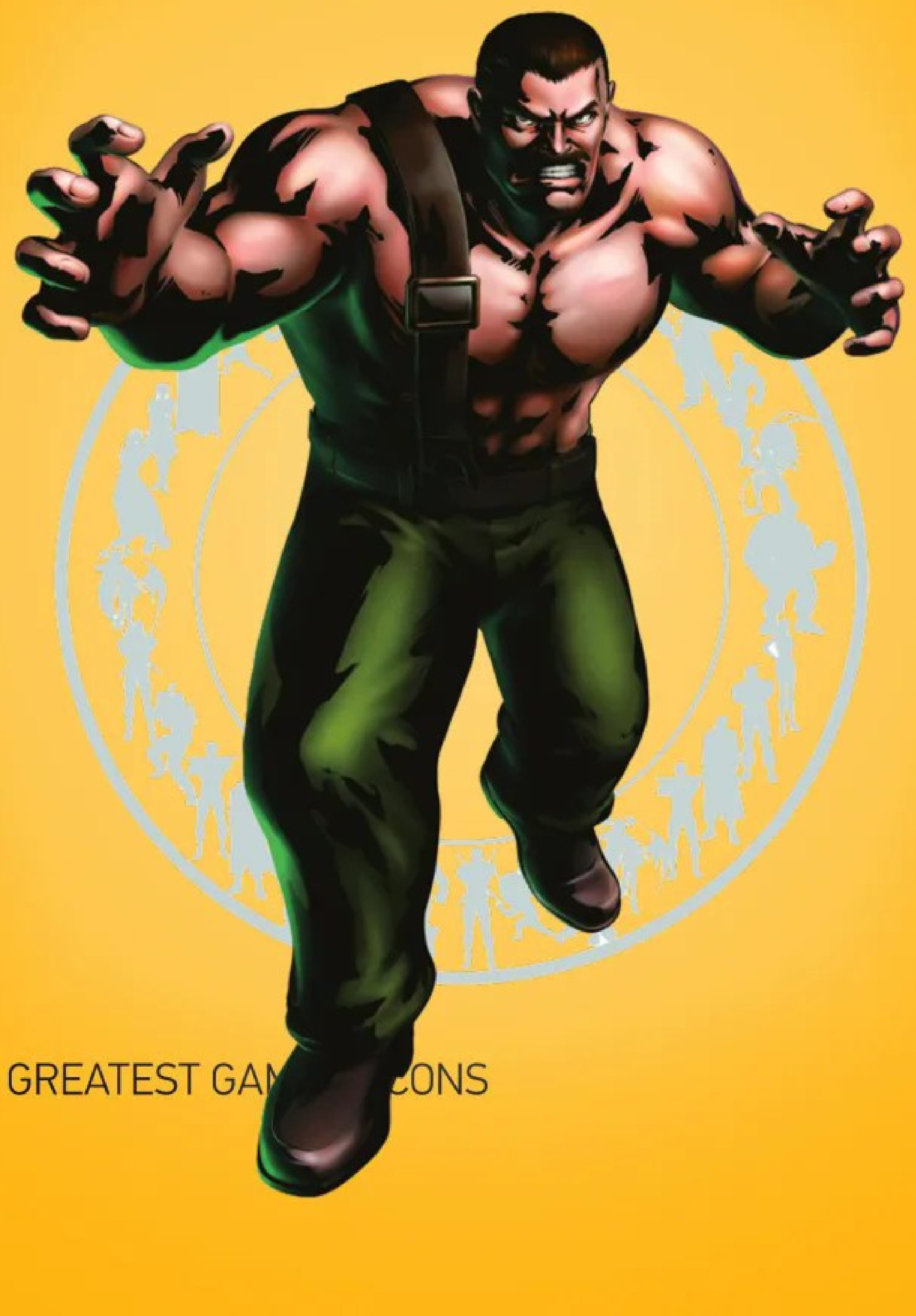
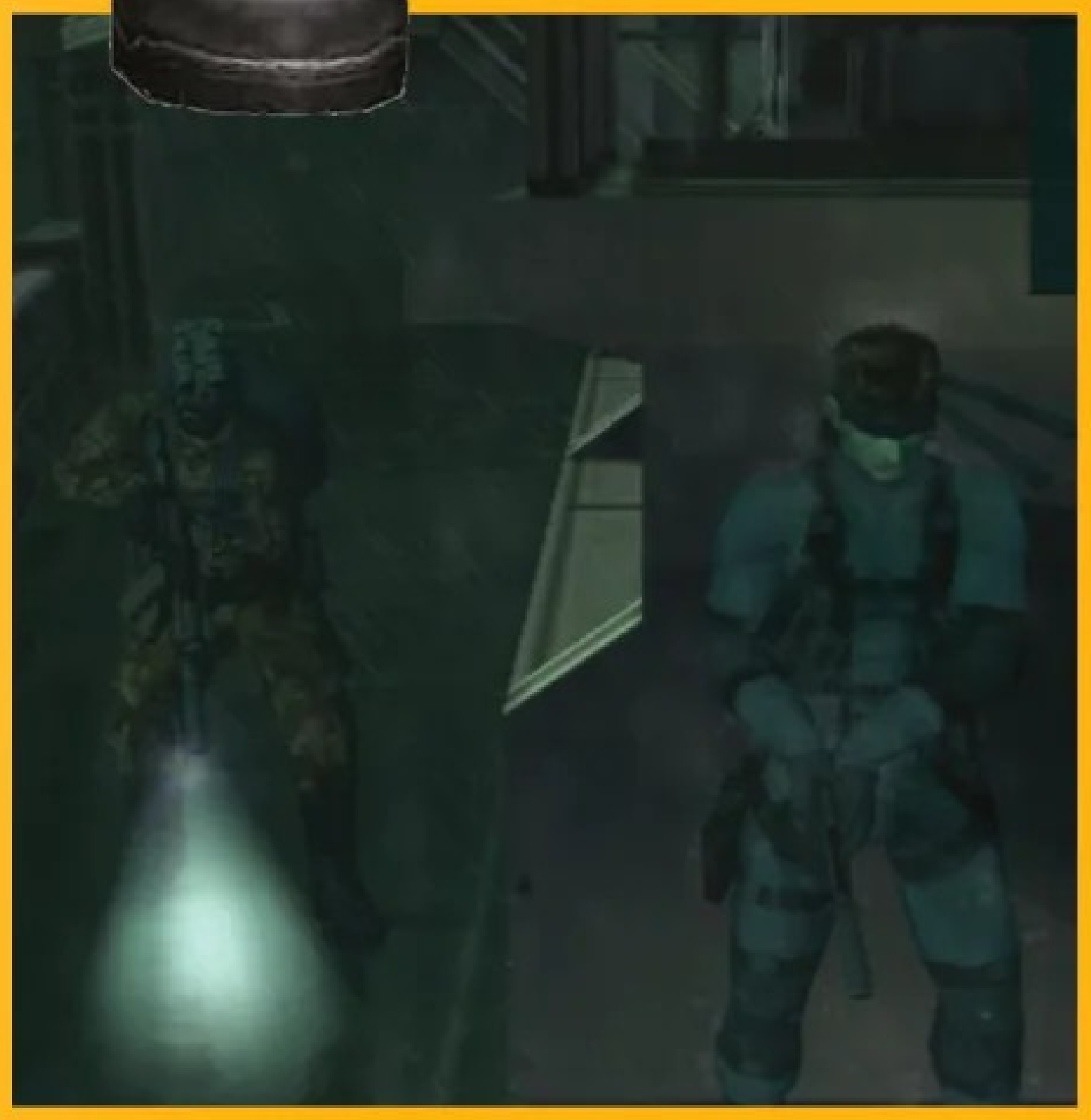
MIKE HAGGAR

28 The mayor of Metro City isn't afraid to get his hands dirty in the fight against crime – especially when his daughter is kidnapped in *Final Fight*. He's a great power brawler, with his wrestling background showing through in piledrivers and dropkicks.



LEON KENNEDY

29 Strangely, Leon tends to show up in games with troubled developments, but his character designs survive as other things change. Capcom famously scrapped *Resident Evil 2* and restarted the entire project quite late into the game's development, but unlike his original co-star Elza Walker, Leon was lucky enough to survive the reboot with his original story mostly intact. *Resident Evil 4* went through a number of concepts before becoming the action horror classic we know today, but even the earlier versions include his new look, complete with leather jacket. Despite these troubles both games became undisputed classics, cementing Leon's status as an icon of his series.



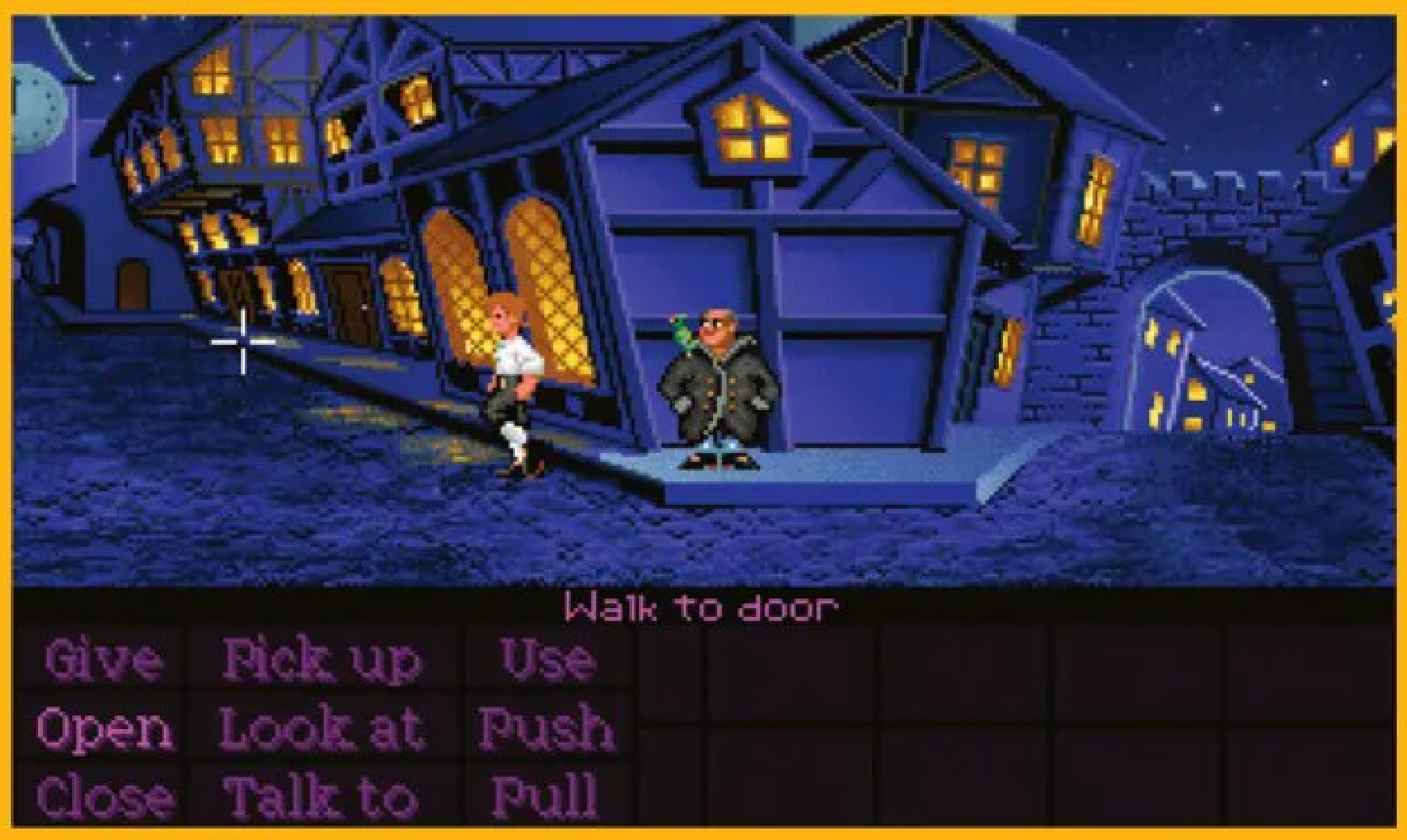
SOLID SNAKE

30 In the early *Metal Gear* MSX2 games, Solid Snake was portrayed as a typical Eighties action hero, but his personality was explored far more thoroughly when he returned in *Metal Gear Solid*, redesigned by Yoji Shinkawa. There he was portrayed as a cool-headed professional, with a surprising distaste for violence considering his profession. Despite his tendency to flirt with female colleagues, Solid Snake is something of a loner – Hideo Kojima once stated that he's the kind of person to go to the venues of parties to which he was invited, only to watch everyone else having fun through the window. Still, that didn't stop players from inviting him back for more games.

GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD

31 Who needs a sword when you can skewer your foes with your razor-sharp wit? That's the philosophy adopted by the hero of the *Monkey Island* series, and one which makes him stand out as one of the most memorable point-and-click protagonists.

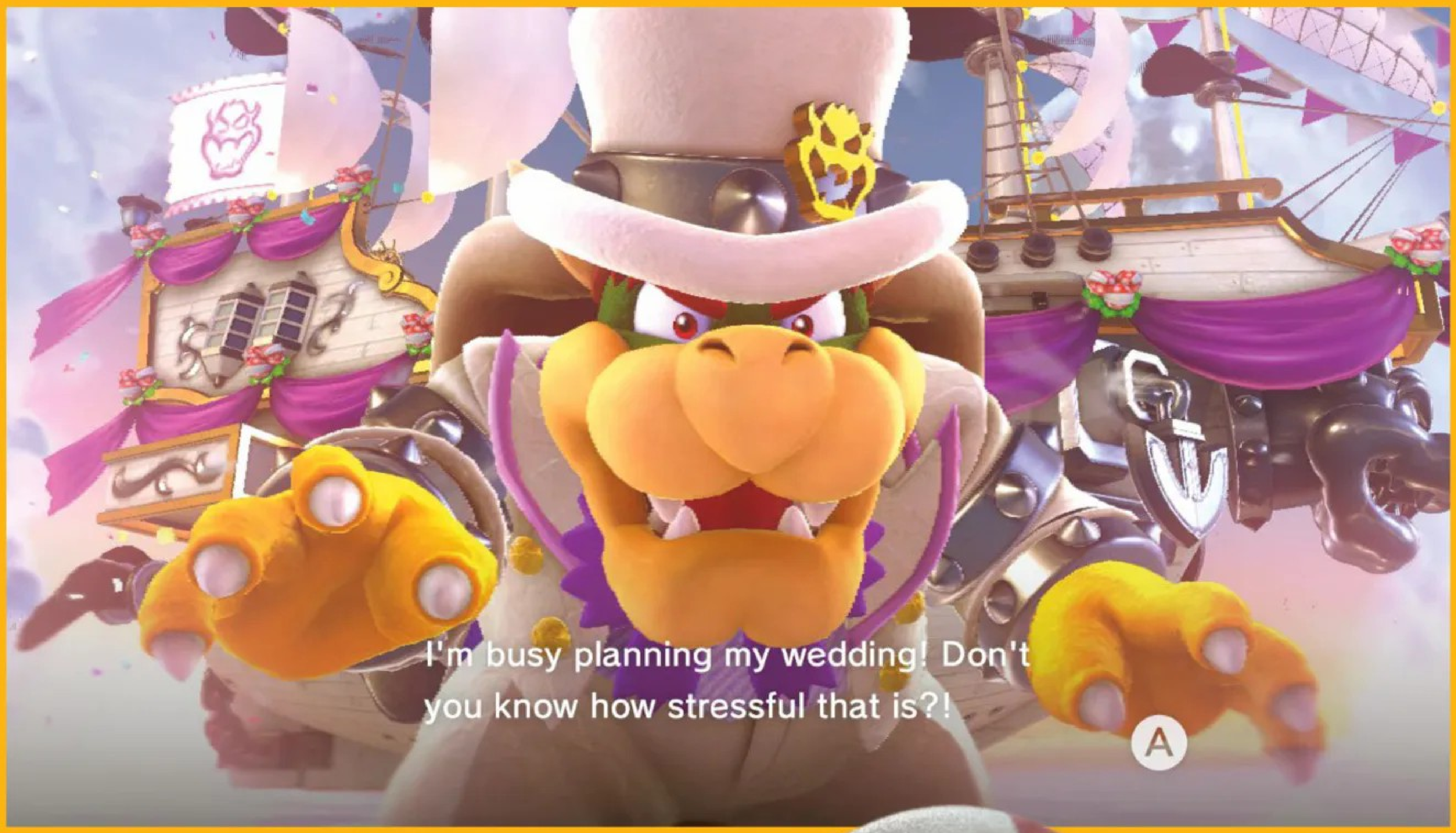
His penchant for painful prose came about as a result of the frequent use of taunts in Errol Flynn's swashbuckling movies, which were a rich source of inspiration for the LucasArts designers. Amusingly, his name was derived from more mundane sources – he was originally referred to simply by the generic name "Guy" and gained his full name from the Deluxe Paint guybrush.bbm brush file used in drawing his sprites.



BOWSER

32 Few villains have risen to the status of Mario's iconic nemesis, who has remained the primary thorn in the plumber's side for decades. Shigeru Miyamoto originally designed the brutish Bowser with the shape of an ox in mind, but Takashi Tezuka had envisioned him as more closely related to the turtle-like Koopa Troopers that he led, so famed animator Yoichi Kotabe helped Miyamoto to refine the designs into the Bowser we know today.

While Bowser is still a bad guy today, he's got plenty of endearing traits – his effectiveness as a heavyweight racer in *Mario Kart*, his humorous lines and his protectiveness as a dad.



I'm busy planning my wedding! Don't you know how stressful that is?!

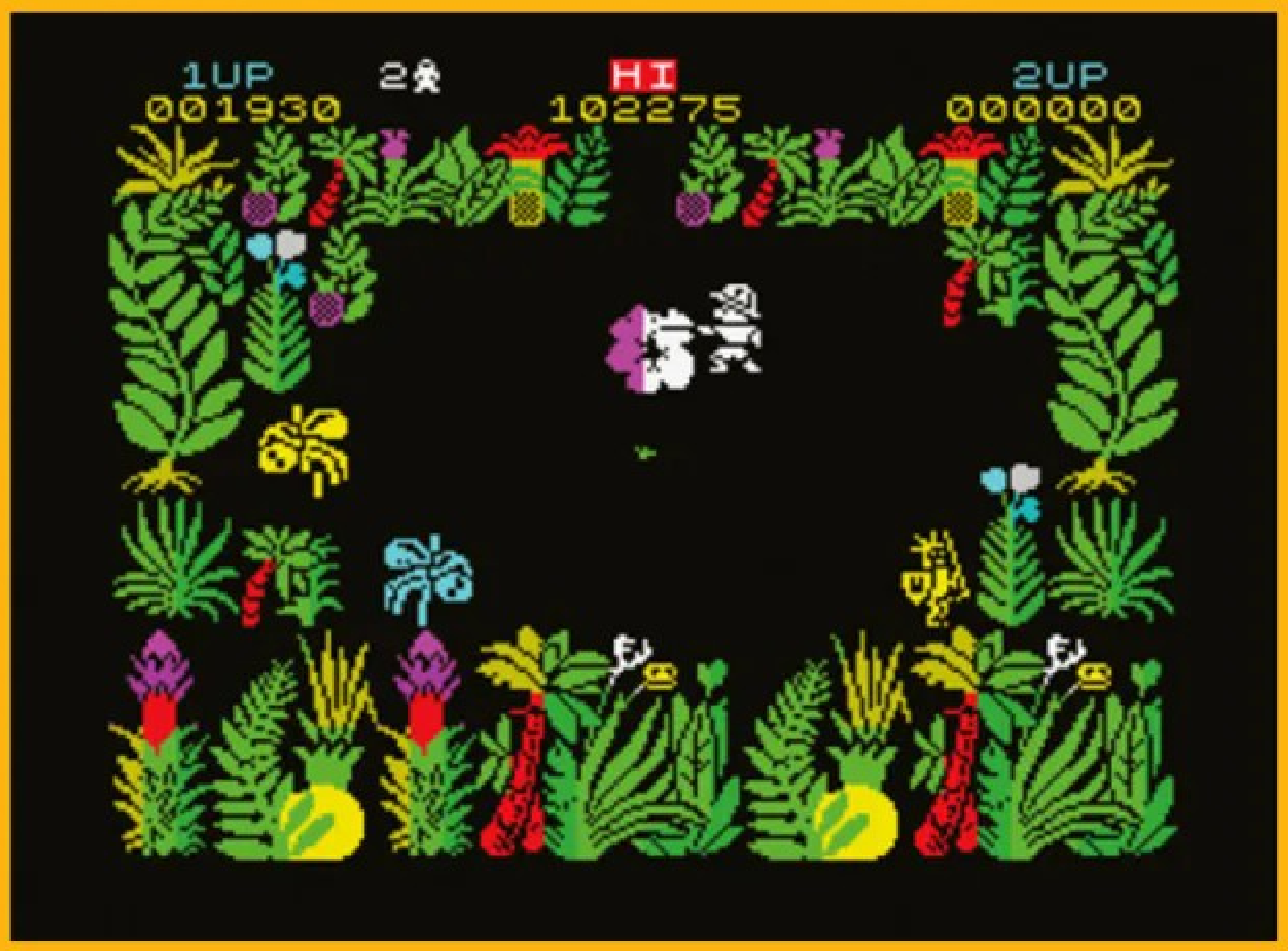
KRATOS

33 The star of the *God Of War* series is a relative newcomer in the ranks of gaming's most iconic characters, and something of an outlier. Where most of the characters here are clearly heroic or at the very least loveable rogues, Kratos is an anti-hero whose role is to allow players to "unleash the nasty fantasies they have in their head" according to original director David Jaffe. There's a grim satisfaction to be had as the "Ghost of Sparta" tears enemies asunder with his chained blades, and brings down the most colossal of foes in the most violent ways imaginable. Kratos' ashen visage and distinctive red tattoo signal danger, and have become so great a part of his character that they were retained through his shift into the new Norse mythology setting of 2018's well received series reboot.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

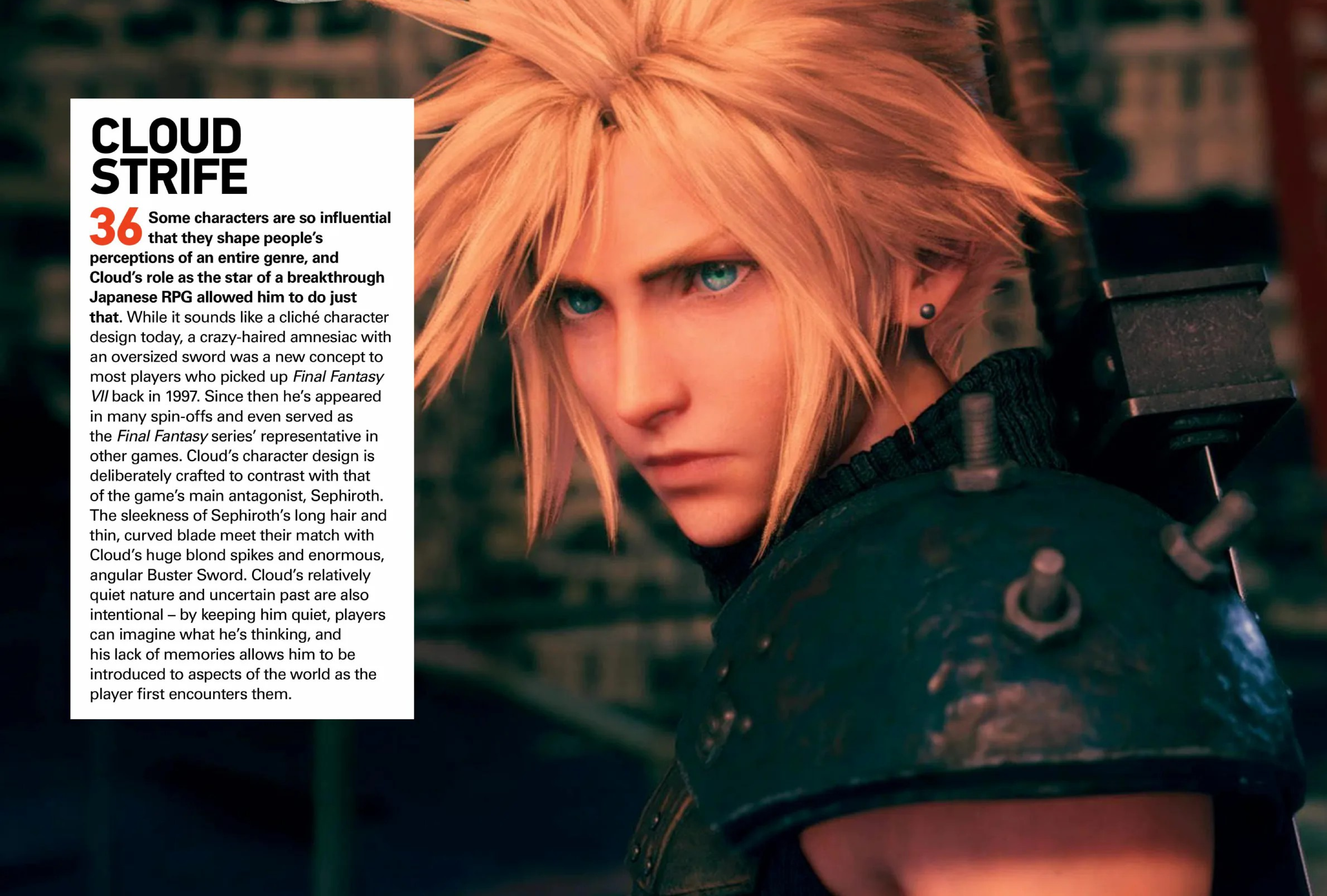
34 When Sega needed a hero to promote its Mega Drive and compete with Mario, it came up with the perfect contrast to the steady and family-friendly fun of Nintendo's character. But while Sega's designs on console market dominance ultimately faded, Sonic has remained popular over the decades – his sleek, streamlined appearance highlights his incredible speed, and his quick quips highlight the attitude that set him apart from the pack and inspired a crowd of imitators in the Nineties.

Sonic has had his ups and downs over the years, but if you pop one of his best outings into your console – *Sonic 2*, *Sonic Generations* or *Sonic Mania* to name some of our favourites – few characters can offer the same kind of thrills he does. When you're barrelling through famous stages like Green Hill Zone and Speed Highway at a supersonic pace, leaping over vast chasms and smashing through enemies with his signature spin attack, you feel an incomparable adrenaline rush. Everything Sonic does draws the attention of the gaming world, and since the spiky speedster shows no signs of slowing down, he'll be turning heads for a long time to come.



SABREMAN

35 Ultimate's adventurer is a star of the home computer era, and one with a more interesting journey than most. After wandering the flick-screen jungle of the excellent *Sabre Wulf* and navigating the platform environments of *Underwurlde*, our hero got a nasty case of lycanthropy and starred in the groundbreaking isometric adventure *Knight Lore*. You'd think that after curing that he'd stay away from the occult, but he returned for a final Spectrum adventure as a wizard in *Pentagram*. That's quite a career path, isn't it?

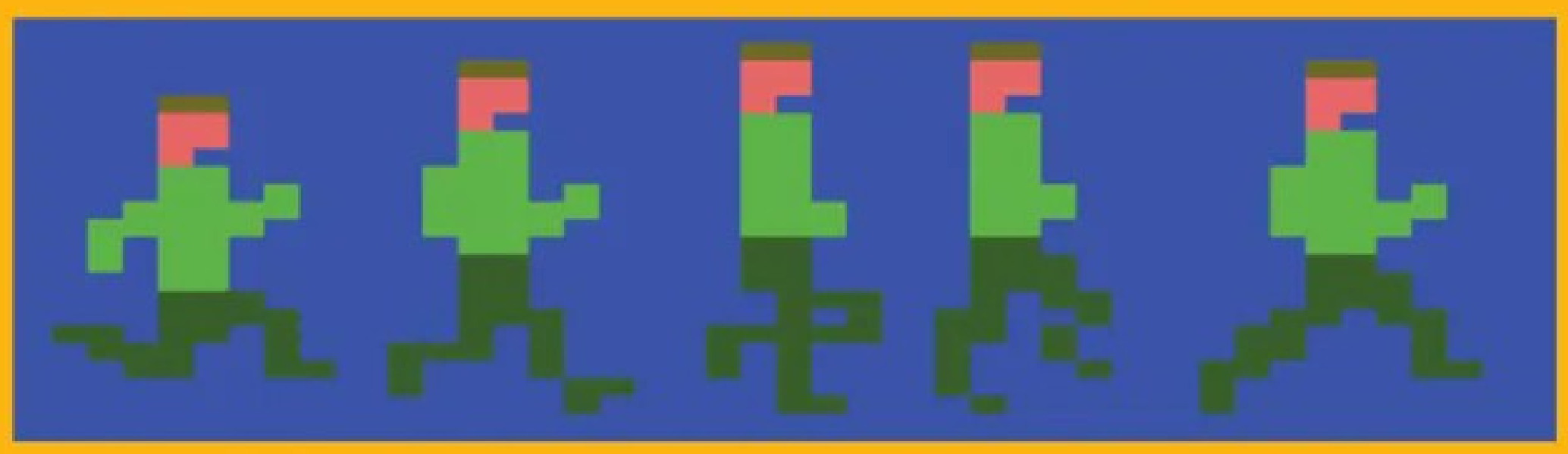


CLOUD STRIFE

36 Some characters are so influential that they shape people's perceptions of an entire genre, and Cloud's role as the star of a breakthrough Japanese RPG allowed him to do just that. While it sounds like a cliché character design today, a crazy-haired amnesiac with an oversized sword was a new concept to most players who picked up *Final Fantasy VII* back in 1997. Since then he's appeared in many spin-offs and even served as the *Final Fantasy* series' representative in other games. Cloud's character design is deliberately crafted to contrast with that of the game's main antagonist, Sephiroth. The sleekness of Sephiroth's long hair and thin, curved blade meet their match with Cloud's huge blond spikes and enormous, angular Buster Sword. Cloud's relatively quiet nature and uncertain past are also intentional – by keeping him quiet, players can imagine what he's thinking, and his lack of memories allows him to be introduced to aspects of the world as the player first encounters them.

PITFALL HARRY

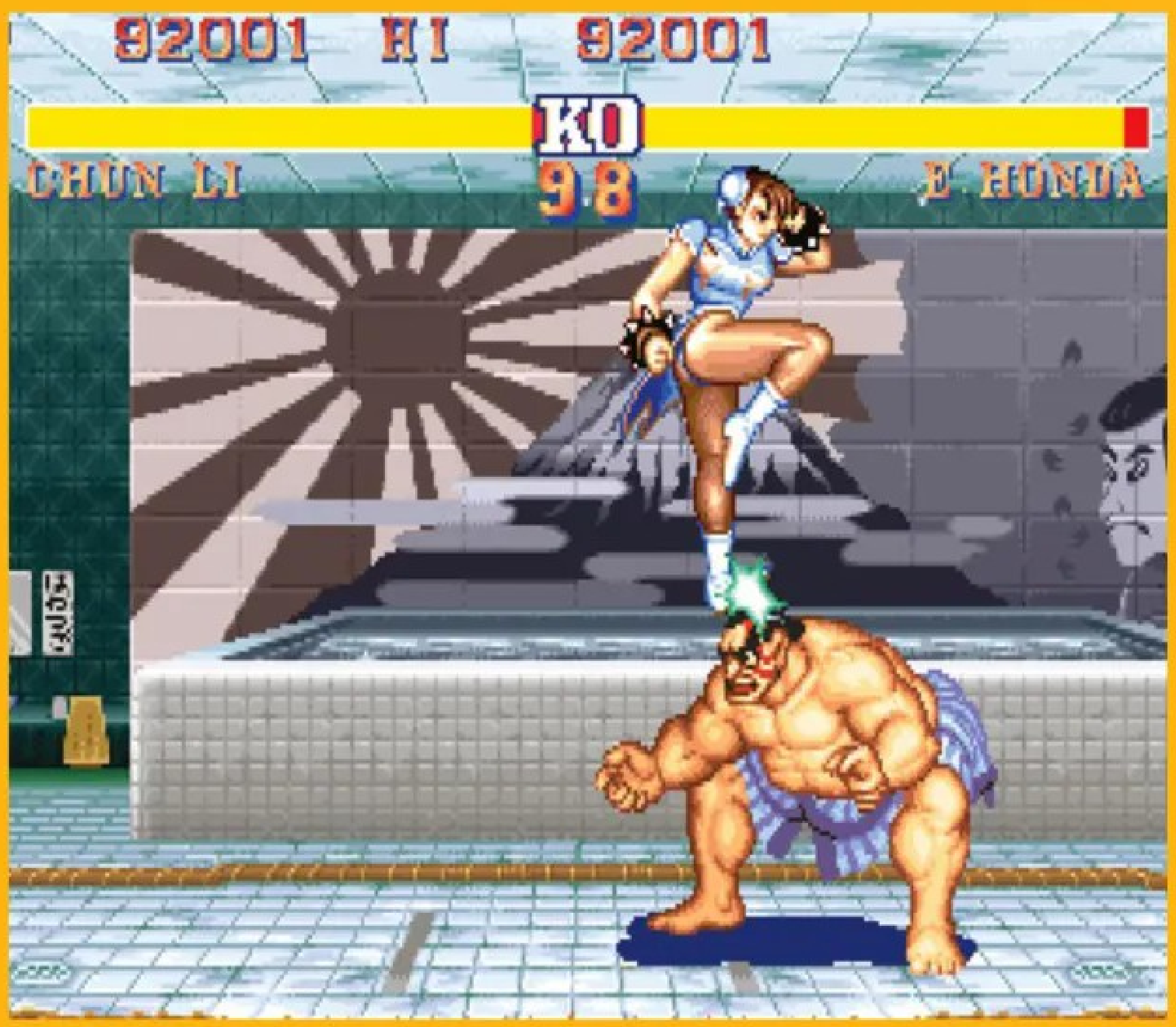
37 This rugged adventurer was born from David Crane's programming skill, as the Activision coder had managed to get the Atari 2600 to display a running man with advanced animation. He captured players' imaginations as he ran through the jungle, leapt over obstacles and swung on vines, as much due to the excellent game design as due to the popularity of Indiana Jones. The blockbuster success of the game – 4 million copies sold on Atari 2600 alone – meant that Harry's adventures continued for over 20 years, and may yet go on.

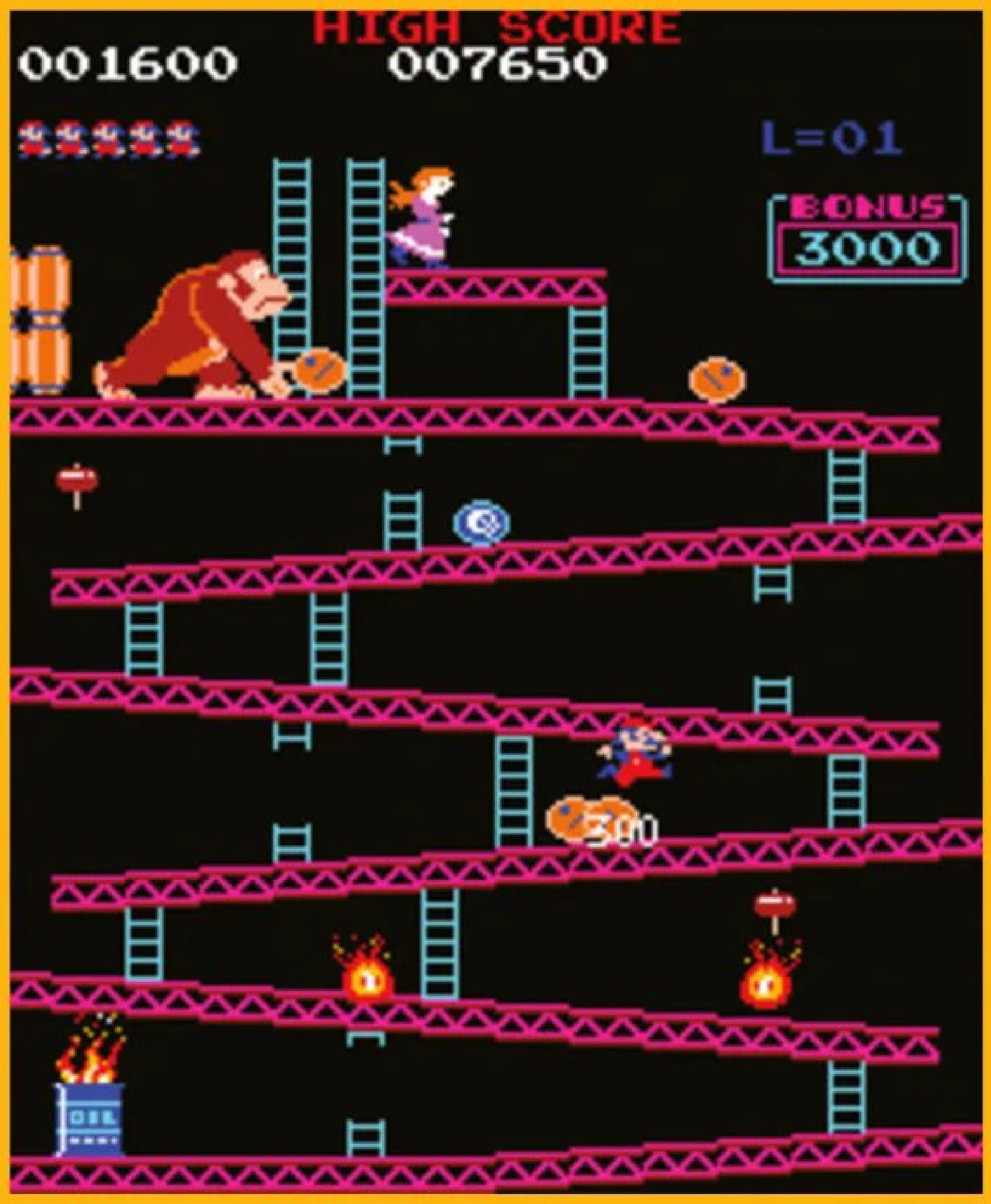


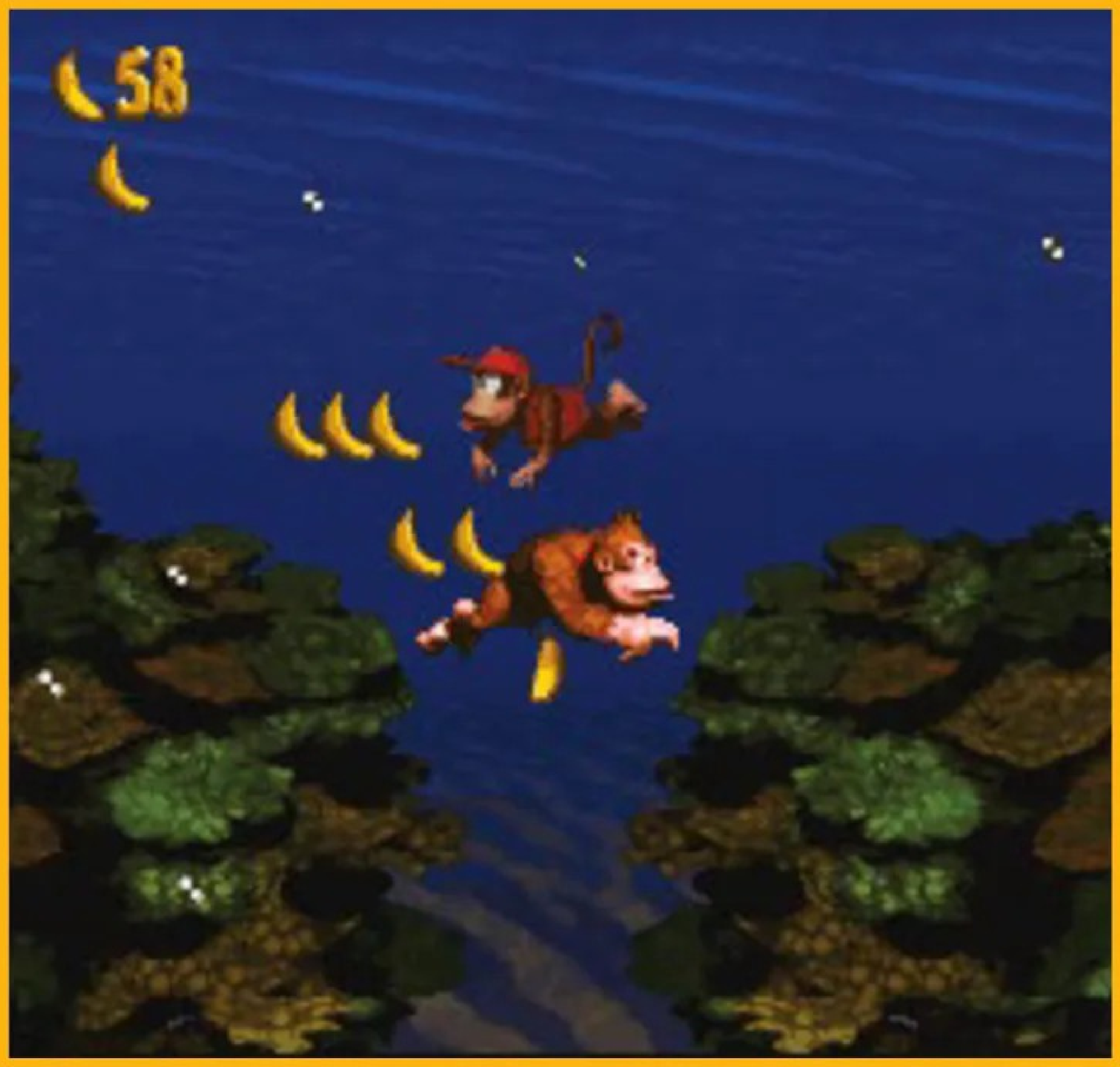
CHUN-LI

38 Prior to the introduction of Chun-Li, fighting games had only allowed players to choose male fighters, making her a true groundbreaker in the genre when she made her debut in 1991. Since then she's been the leading light of the *Street Fighter* series' female contingent, and has rarely been absent from the games – even when she was left out of *Street Fighter III*, fan demand saw her added to the definitive *Third Strike* version. She's well known for her fearsome speed and agility, as well as her powerful kicks.

Chun-Li was designed over the course of just five weeks, and her character designers were worried that the compressed schedule would lead to a sloppy design. She actually wore trousers until the last moment, when she gained her trademark tights. Her muscular physique specifically intended to show that she could compete on an even basis with the male members of the roster, but in spite this, producer Yoshiki Okamoto wanted to make her life bar shorter to represent relatively lower strength. Director Akira Nishitani objected and this idea was ultimately scrapped.

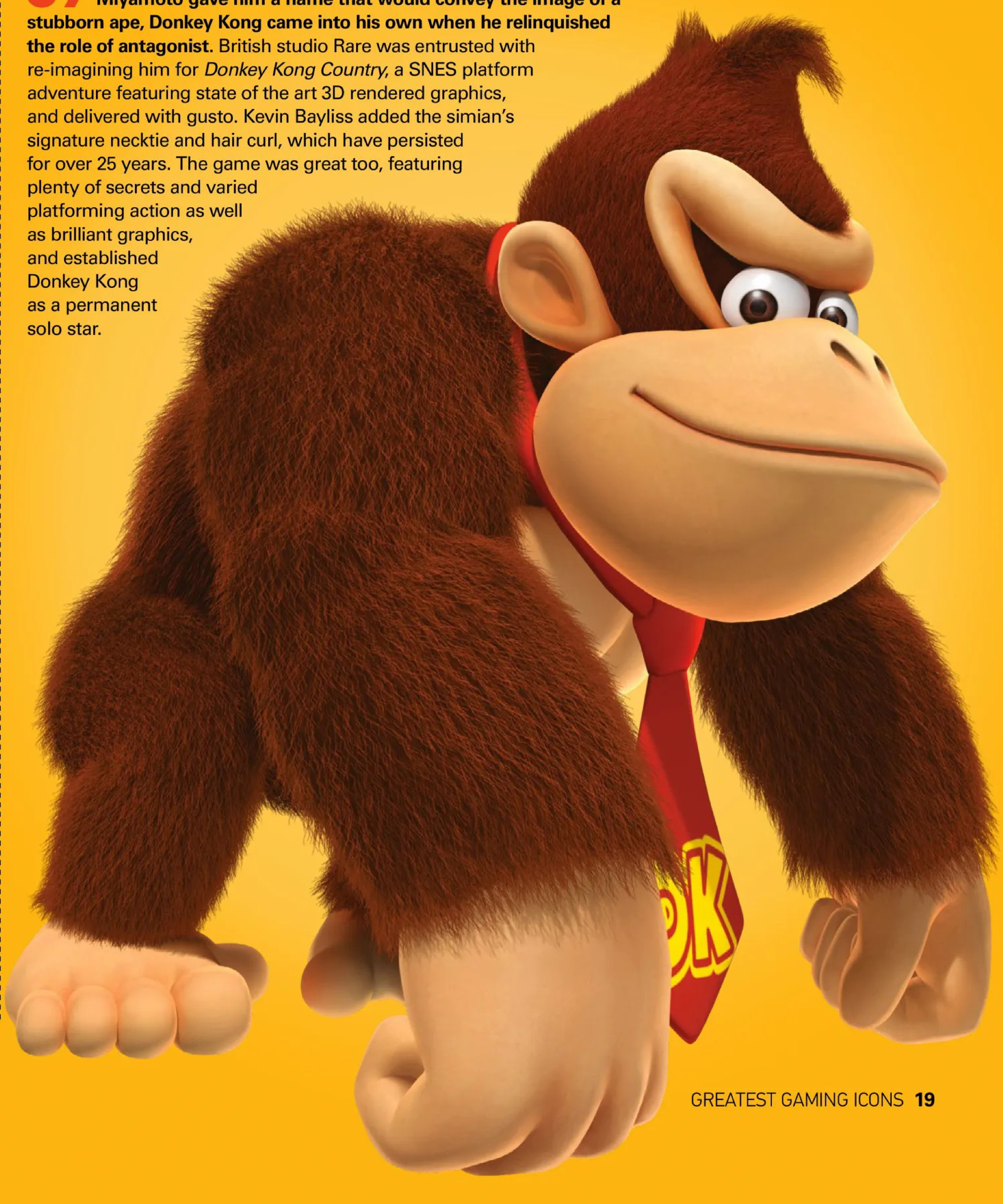






DONKEY KONG

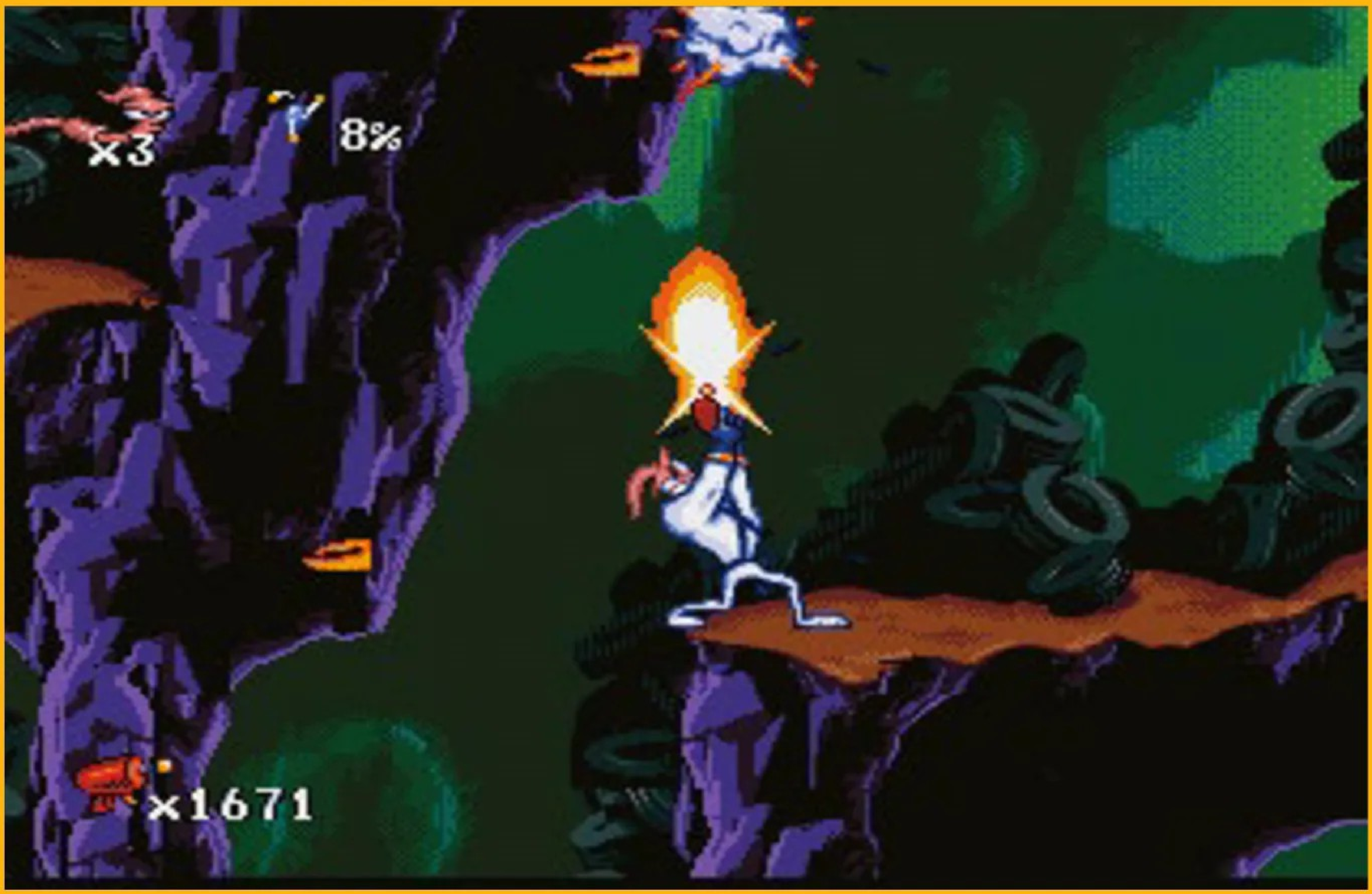
39 While Donkey Kong has his origins in the arcade, where Shigeru Miyamoto gave him a name that would convey the image of a stubborn ape, Donkey Kong came into his own when he relinquished the role of antagonist. British studio Rare was entrusted with re-imagining him for *Donkey Kong Country*, a SNES platform adventure featuring state of the art 3D rendered graphics, and delivered with gusto. Kevin Bayliss added the simian's signature necktie and hair curl, which have persisted for over 25 years. The game was great too, featuring plenty of secrets and varied platforming action as well as brilliant graphics, and established Donkey Kong as a permanent solo star.

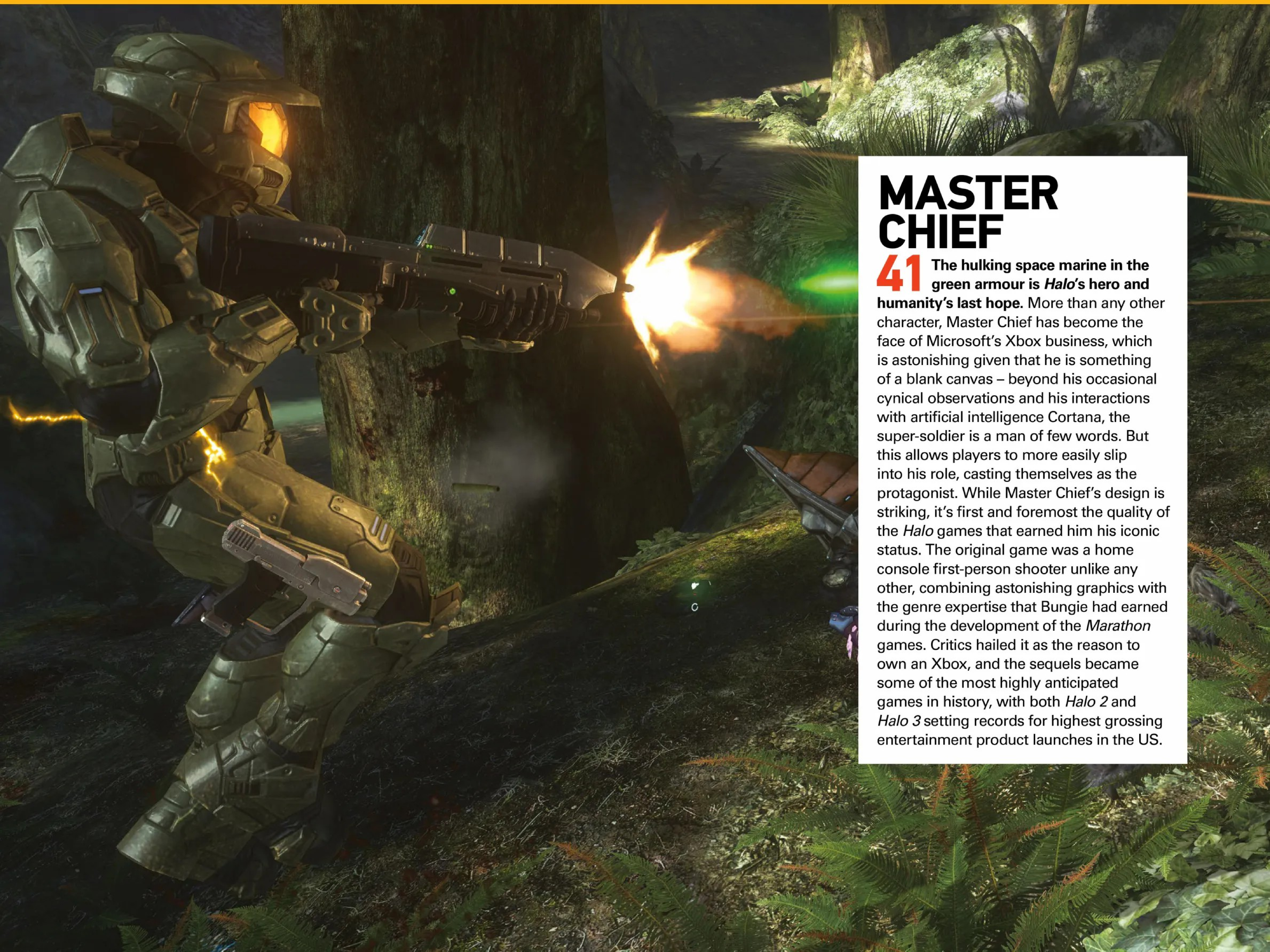


EARTHWORM JIM

40 When Earthworm Jim hit the console scene in the mid-Nineties, he was a breath of fresh air. The team at Shiny Entertainment had been creating excellent platform games for years, but always using licensed properties. Freed from the shackles of portraying someone else's characters the team decided to cut loose, marrying the proven game design with characters that mocked market trends instead of following them. The generic princess that needed rescuing was literally Princess What's-Her-Name, stair lifts counted as exciting vehicles, and there were plenty of bizarre non-sequiturs (usually served with a healthy side of cow).

The character's explosive popularity eventually resulted in a TV cartoon series and a series of sequels, but he's been quiet for a while now. The original team is currently preparing Jim's home console comeback.



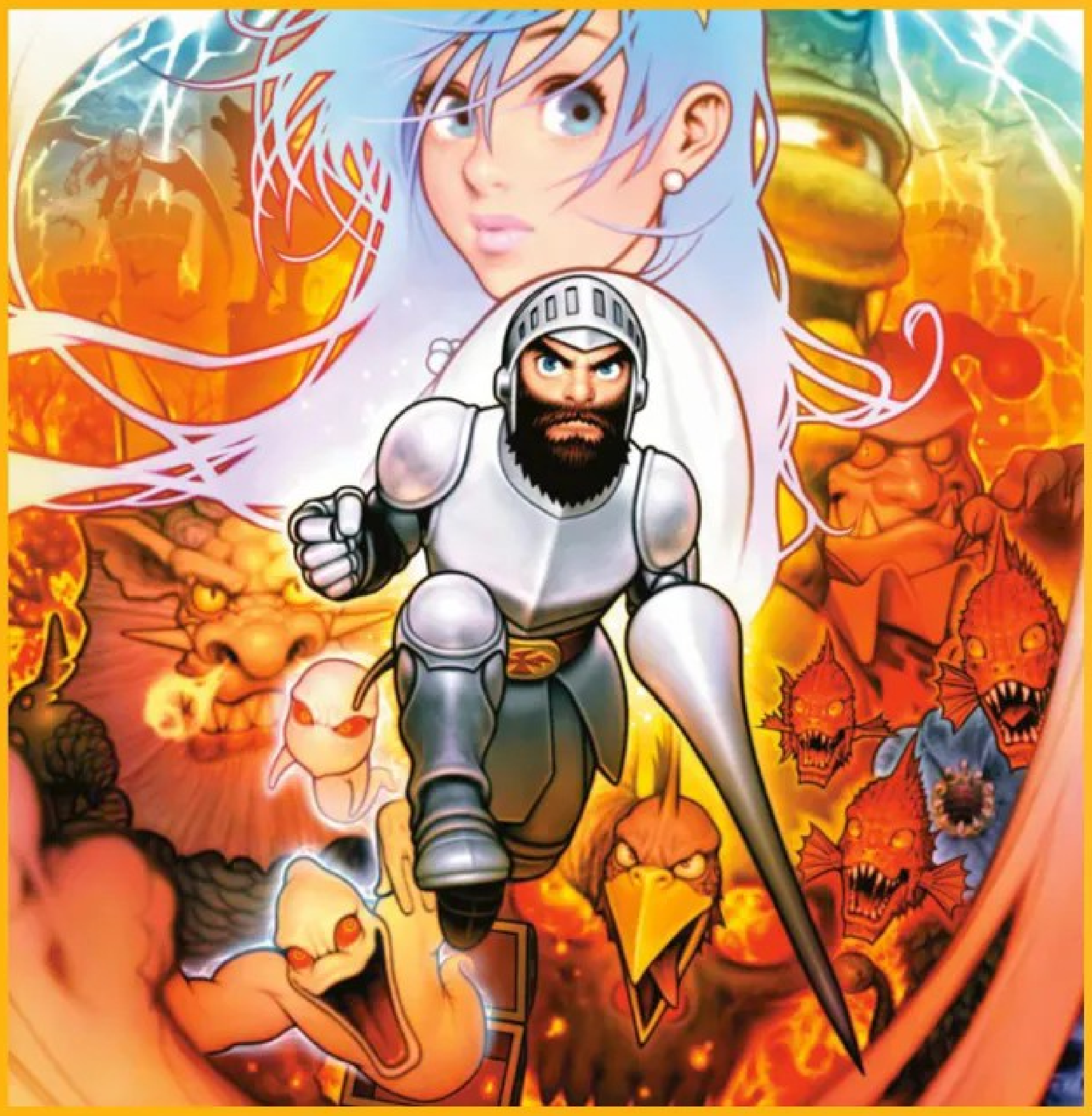


MASTER CHIEF

41 The hulking space marine in the green armour is *Halo*'s hero and humanity's last hope. More than any other character, Master Chief has become the face of Microsoft's Xbox business, which is astonishing given that he is something of a blank canvas – beyond his occasional cynical observations and his interactions with artificial intelligence Cortana, the super-soldier is a man of few words. But this allows players to more easily slip into his role, casting themselves as the protagonist. While Master Chief's design is striking, it's first and foremost the quality of the *Halo* games that earned him his iconic status. The original game was a home console first-person shooter unlike any other, combining astonishing graphics with the genre expertise that Bungie had earned during the development of the *Marathon* games. Critics hailed it as the reason to own an Xbox, and the sequels became some of the most highly anticipated games in history, with both *Halo 2* and *Halo 3* setting records for highest grossing entertainment product launches in the US.

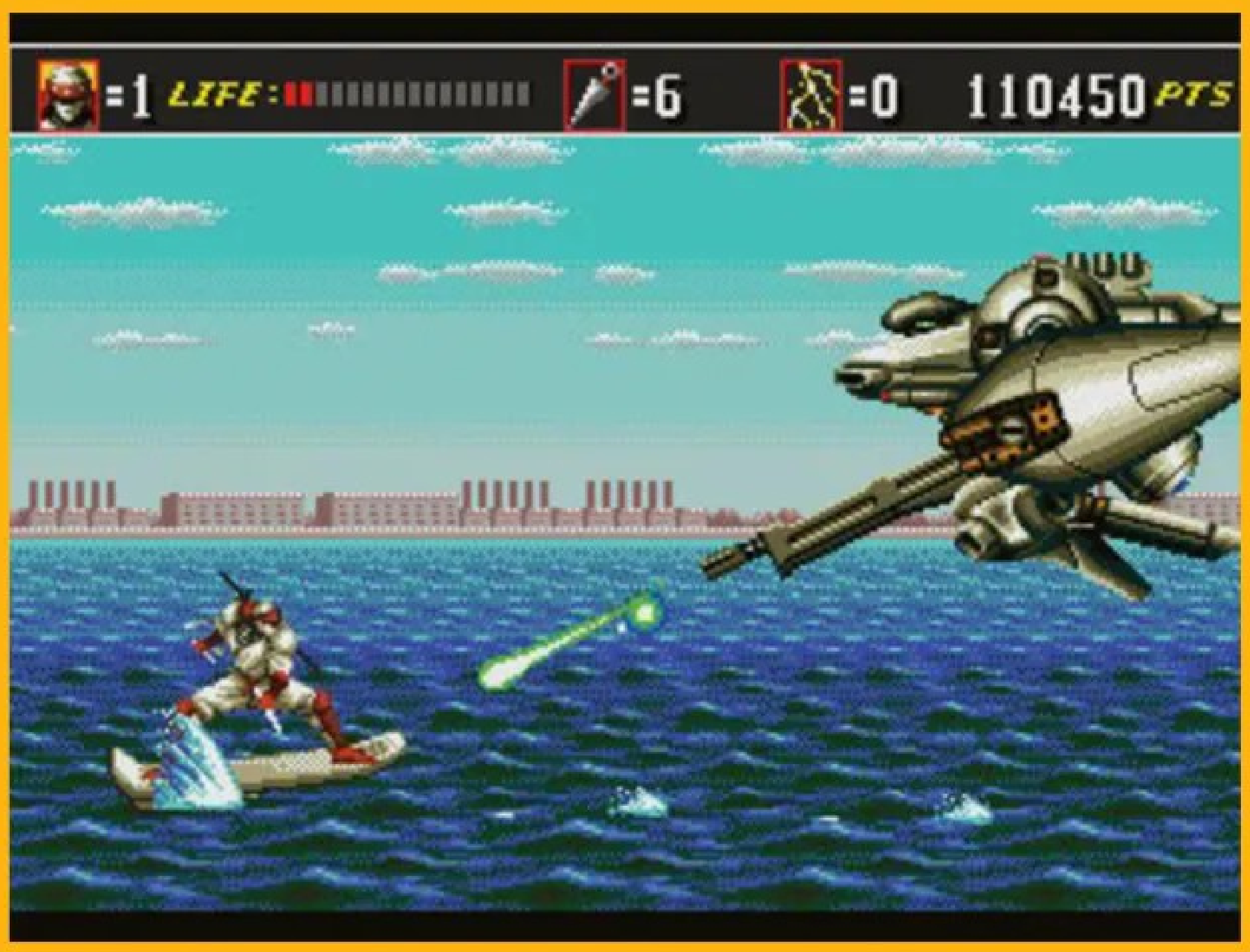
SIR ARTHUR

42 There aren't many people that can get away with running around in their pants, but the star of the *Ghosts N Goblins* is a celebrated hero despite doing exactly that. To be fair, that's probably because the game is so difficult that players aren't concentrating on what he's wearing – the horrors that pursue our brave knight as he attempts to rescue the princess are *not* messing about. But it's fun to take on the challenge anyway thanks to the music and Arthur's frantic running, so the game was a success for Capcom. That meant more adventures for Sir Arthur, all of which were as tough as battling through Hades itself.



JOE MUSASHI

43 The star of the *Shinobi* series is a deadly presence, as the most skilled ninja of the Oboro clan has claimed mastery over all forms of combat – as well as close quarters martial arts and swordplay, he's deadly from a distance with shurikens and even a pistol in the original game. He's even able to perform ninja magic, with a variety of ninjutsu at his disposal. Joe's portrayal evolved over the years, with his methodical pace and traditional black clothing giving way to exceptional agility and white clothes, but successors like Hotsuma and Hibana never quite captured the imagination in the same way.



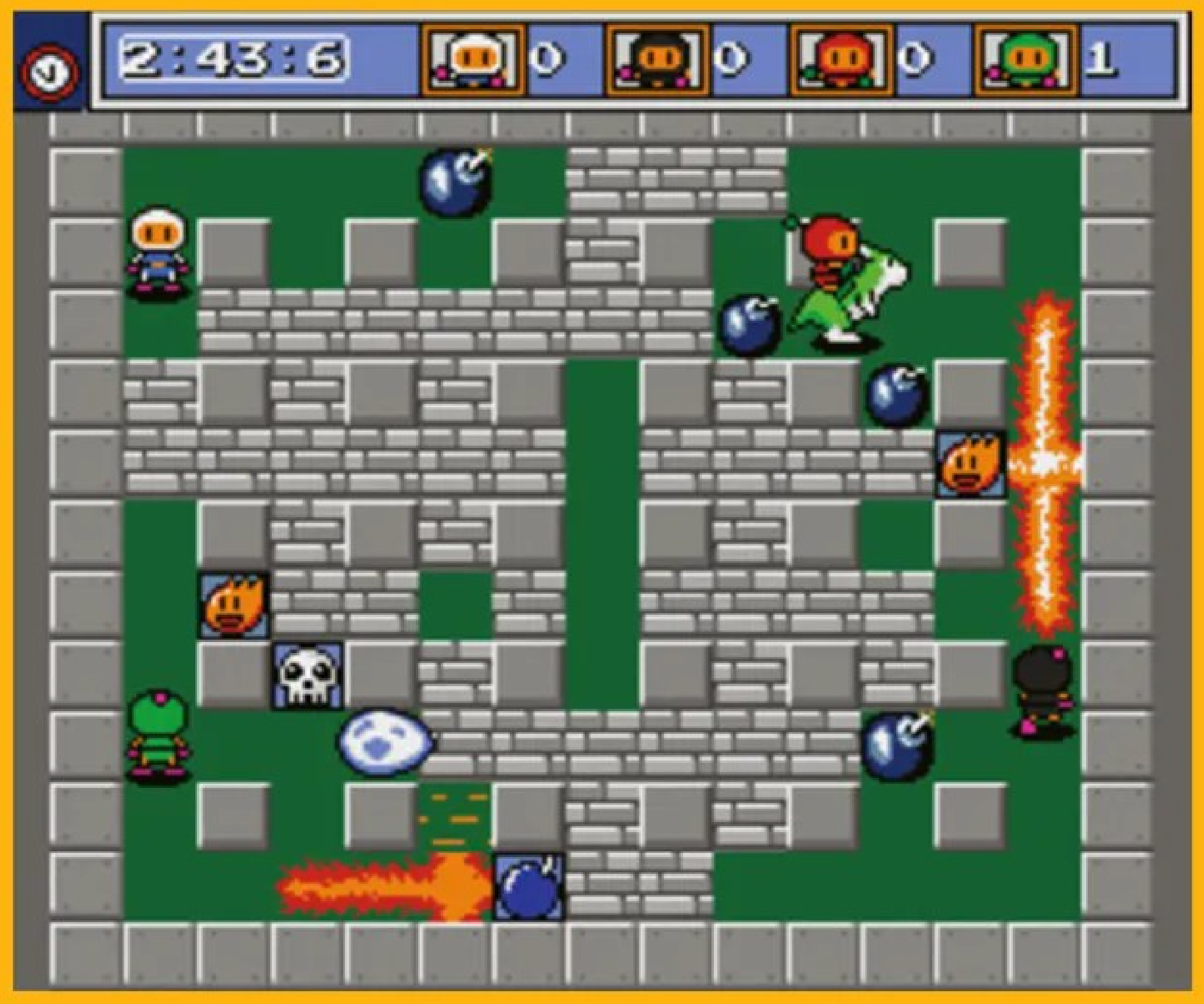
PIKACHU

44 Pikachu was designed by Atsuko Nishida, who had been drafted in to design cute creatures to contrast with the fearsome designs of Ken Sugimori. The designer wasn't given much direction other than that the creature was to be an electric type monster, and her original design was nothing like the character we know today. But it was named Pikachu, and the "chu" sound is a Japanese onomatopoeia for a mouse's squeaks, so the design was revised to fit the name.

The red cheeks it uses to store electricity were inspired by the way squirrels store food in theirs. Pikachu's popularity was secured when the director of the tie-in anime chose Pikachu as Ash's partner, with the reasoning that he shouldn't choose one of the three actual starter Pokémon to avoid upsetting players that hadn't picked that one.

LEMMINGS

45 **How much character can you pack into an 8x8 block of pixels? That was the challenge that DMA Design had to tackle with *Lemmings*, and the answer was loads.** And while most of our icons are singular entities, there also happen to be loads of Lemmings, which is good because you'll rarely manage to get anything done with just one of them. Most of the time it's necessary to direct some of the mindless marchers to perform tasks like climbing and digging that will save the rest, but it's also enormous fun to watch the green-haired critters die horrible deaths – and that's a good thing, given the series' tricky puzzles.



BOMBERMAN

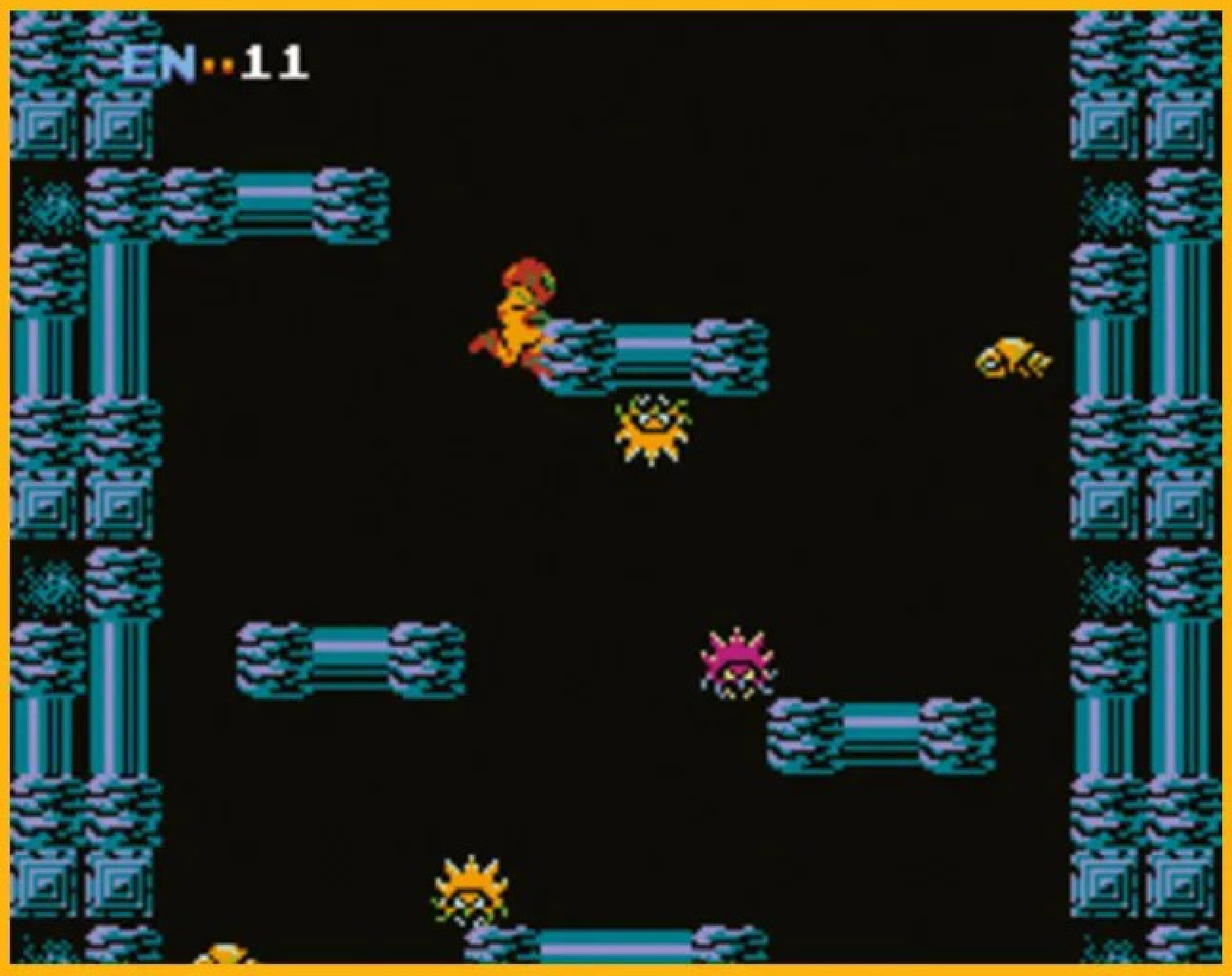
46 **Hudson Soft's hero has one of the most literal names in gaming – he's a man who runs around causing explosions.** That sort of behaviour would see you either arrested or hired by Michael Bay in real life, but in videogames Bomberman is a hero who often saves the galaxy.

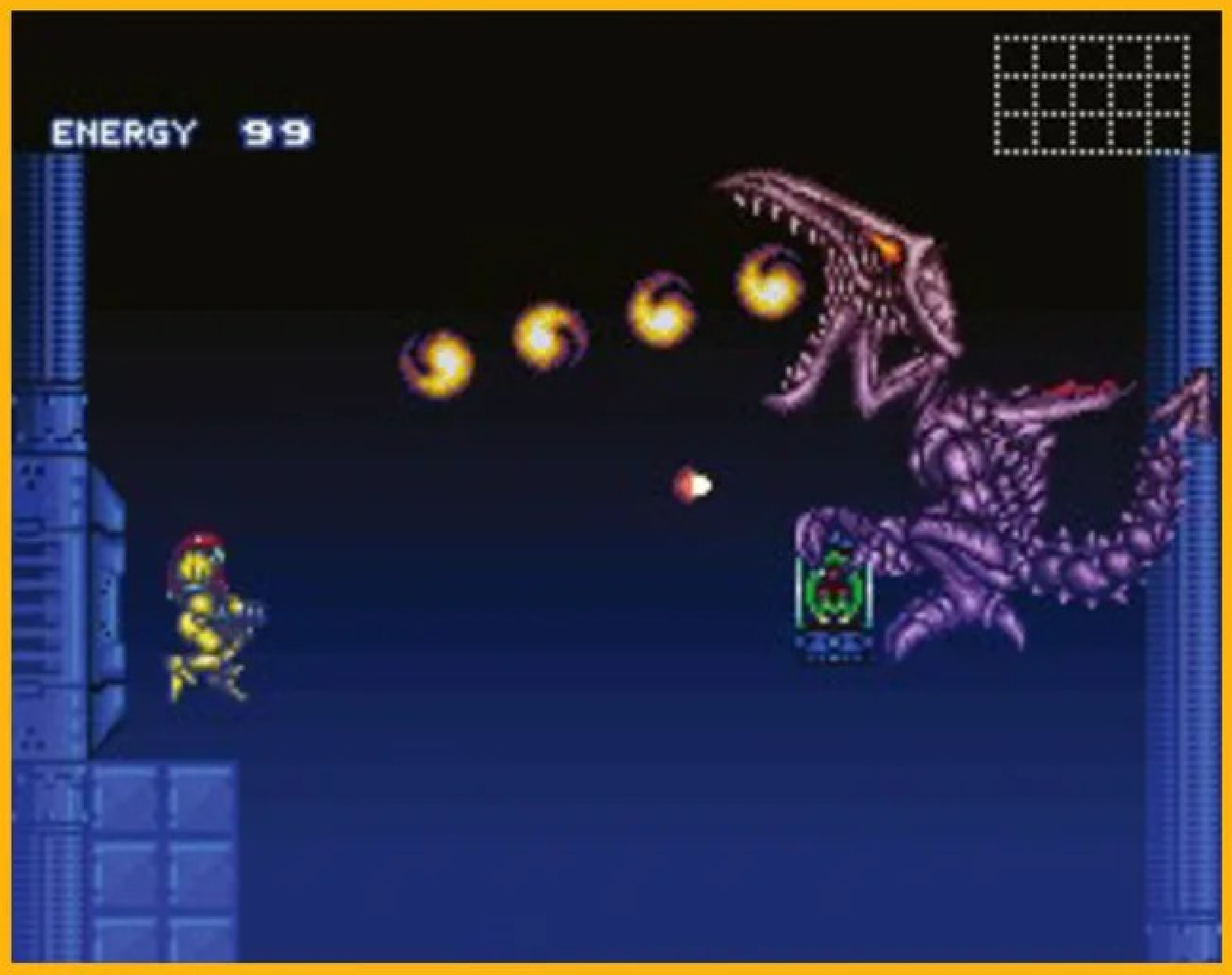
He was originally conceptualised as a bomb-making robot who dreamed of gaining freedom and humanity, but his origins have rarely stayed the same from game to game. What has remained constant is the fun – while his early appearances on home computers and the NES were single-player affairs, the addition of multiplayer during the Nineties turned *Bomberman* into a truly classic series.

SAMUS ARAN

47 **Few games are so popular as to have named an entire sub-genre, but *Metroid* is one of them.** Nintendo's platform adventure was a significant development in the genre, as it presented a huge non-linear world that slowly opened up as the player gains new abilities – a game design used by later games including *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, leading to the Metroidvania portmanteau commonly used today.

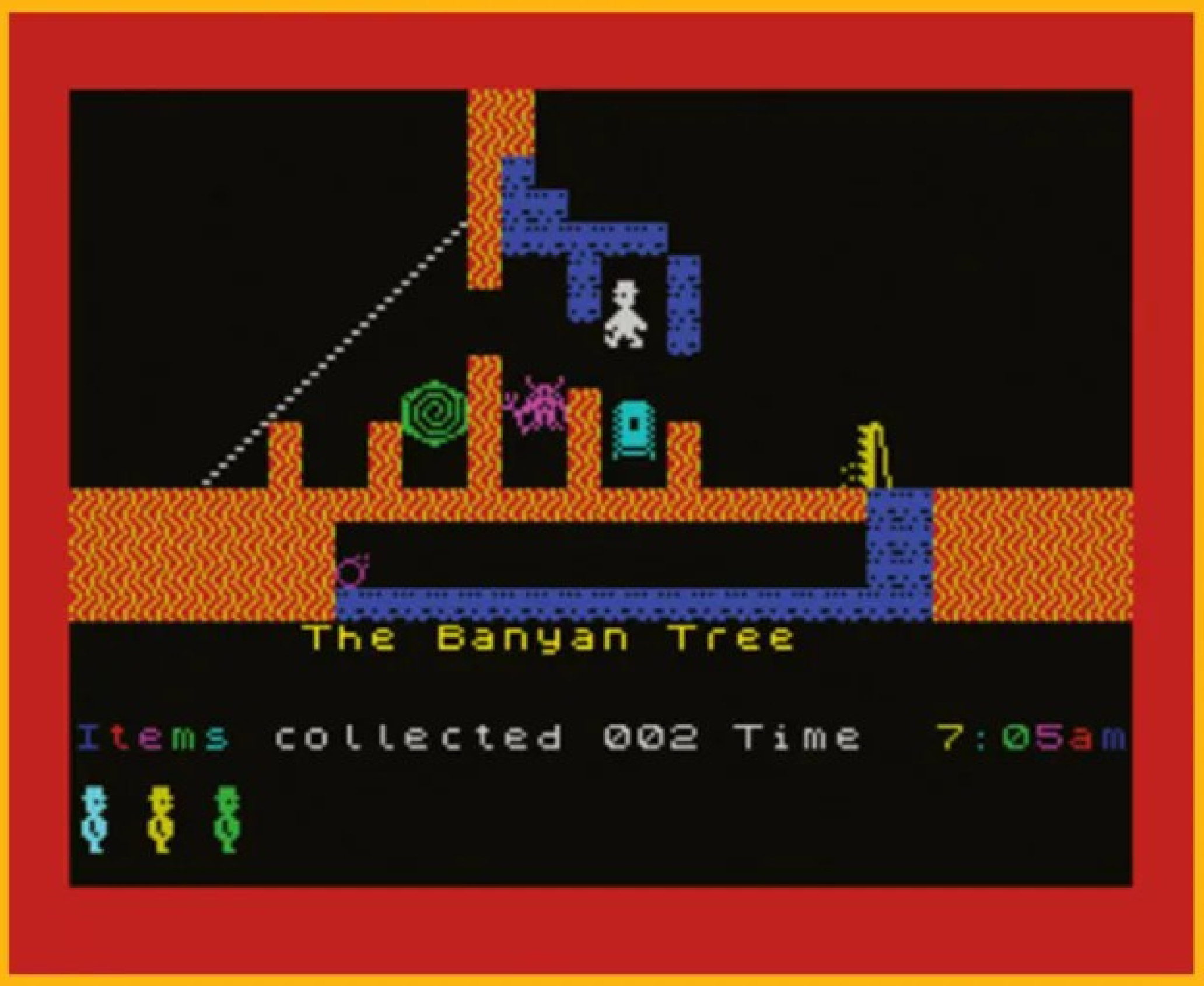
The quality of the game popularised the character that gains those new abilities – Samus Aran, a bounty hunter whose skills are renowned across space. Samus happens to be a woman, but that little secret is kept back for those who complete the game quickly. *Metroid* portrays her as a solitary figure in a cavernous, hostile world, and that feeling of loneliness combined with the drive to explore further became the signature feeling of the series, through a variety of sequels and reinventions.





MINER WILLY

48 While Miner Willy left behind only a short legacy, a generation of 8-bit computer owners holds him in high esteem as the star of two enormously influential platform games, *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*. Both were developed by Matthew Smith, whose unique creativity shone through in his games – making Miner Willy our point of access into his bizarre and abstract worlds. Sadly the industry was not kind to the young developer and the proposed follow-up *The Mega Tree* (or *Willy Meets The Taxman*) never saw the light of day, cutting off a potentially long-running series just as it was getting started. The impact of the games he did release is such that seeing Willy's monochrome sprite still makes us all misty-eyed.



DUKE NUKEM

49 In today's more politically correct climate, it might seem absurd that Duke Nukem became a gaming icon, but back in the Nineties his brand of macho swagger was all the rage. He was a relatively sensible presence in his early side-scrolling adventures, and it was *Duke Nukem 3D* that really changed his image. Suddenly the Duke was a walking wall of testosterone, messily dispatching pig enemies, taking time to appreciate the female population of each stage and chucking out one liners like they were going out of style. While his career was derailed by the 15 year development of *Duke Nukem Forever*, fans stuck by him and continue to pick up older games – and that's because there's still no power fantasy that satisfies quite the same needs.

LINK

50 The star of *The Legend Of Zelda* series is a dutiful kind of fellow. He's a young lad who somehow finds his way into conflicts upon which the fate of the world hinges, but he never shirks his responsibilities. No, Link's not like that – he'll fight the big spiders and search the grass for rupees, never once offering a world of complaint. Heck, he's even okay being overshadowed in the titles of the games he stars in. To be fair, that's more to do with the fact that he never seems to offer much commentary on any topic, but he's meant to be a character you can project yourself onto – and it works. Regardless of whether you've ever engaged in a sword fight, tried to use a grappling hook or managed to get a boomerang to successfully return, you'll definitely want to fill Link's boots since he stars in an action-RPG series of astonishingly consistent quality.

SPACE INVADER

Gaming's first memorable villains may just be the medium's greatest icon as well. We reveal the sheer brilliance of 1978's Space Invader

ICON PROFILE

» **NAME:** INVADER

» **FIRST SEEN IN:** SPACE INVADERS

» **LAST SEEN IN:** ARKANOID VS SPACE INVADERS

» **FINEST HOUR:** SPACE INVADERS: INFINITY WAR

» **NOTABLE FOR:** ADVANCING

The Hall Of Fame is exclusively reserved for character studies. But we're willing to make an exception. You can't really describe the space invader as a character. It never speaks, it doesn't move through a story and barely interacts with those around it other than to mindlessly advance, in formation, towards its inevitable demise. However, there are two factors that make the space invader as significant as any number of Marios, Sonics or Laras. First, he has infinitely more personality than the player avatar, a faceless unnamed cannon. Second, this anonymous, mass-produced monster is still, 40-odd years after its creation, more synonymous with games than any of the above characters.

From T-shirts to skyscraper windows lit up like pixels and street-corner graffiti, the invader is the ultimate go-to guy for capturing the idea of videogame culture in a single, simple image. Of course, there were games before *Space Invaders*, but was there anything before 1978 to match the iconic quality of Taito's villainous alien? The text-based colossal cave adventures of university mainframes obviously couldn't, while the straight lines and perfect squares of *Pong* could literally mean anything used out of context.

So can the invader's rise be attributed to just being in the right place at the right time, simply being among the first wave of recognisable gaming icons? That has a lot to do with it, but to credit the little guy's popularity to timing is unfair on the economical yet evocative design. Measuring just twelve pixels in width and eight in height, the invader's sprite allowed little room to create anything of detail. And with Taito's budget only allowing for a monochrome display, it was hard Nishikado to work around his restrictions. But the pioneering designer did it, creating three visibly different invaders, around the same theme but all as easily identifiable as each other.

Interestingly, Nishikado's alien visitors weren't intended to be aliens at all. In his initial design they were an army of marching stick-men until Taito's president ordered that they be changed. Nishikado then found inspiration in the recently released *Star Wars*, and sensed the incoming sci-fi boom.

The human enemies became aliens from outer space, but they looked nothing like the bipedal creatures of George Lucas's hit movie. Inspiration was instead taken from HG Wells' 1898 novel *The War Of The Worlds*. Speaking to **Retro Gamer** in early-2009, Nishikado explained "I took the octopus-like aliens from *War Of The Worlds* as a starting point, to influence the design of the biggest enemy targets in the game. For the targets in the middle of the screen, I modelled them on the image of a crab, and for the uppermost enemies I was thinking of squid."

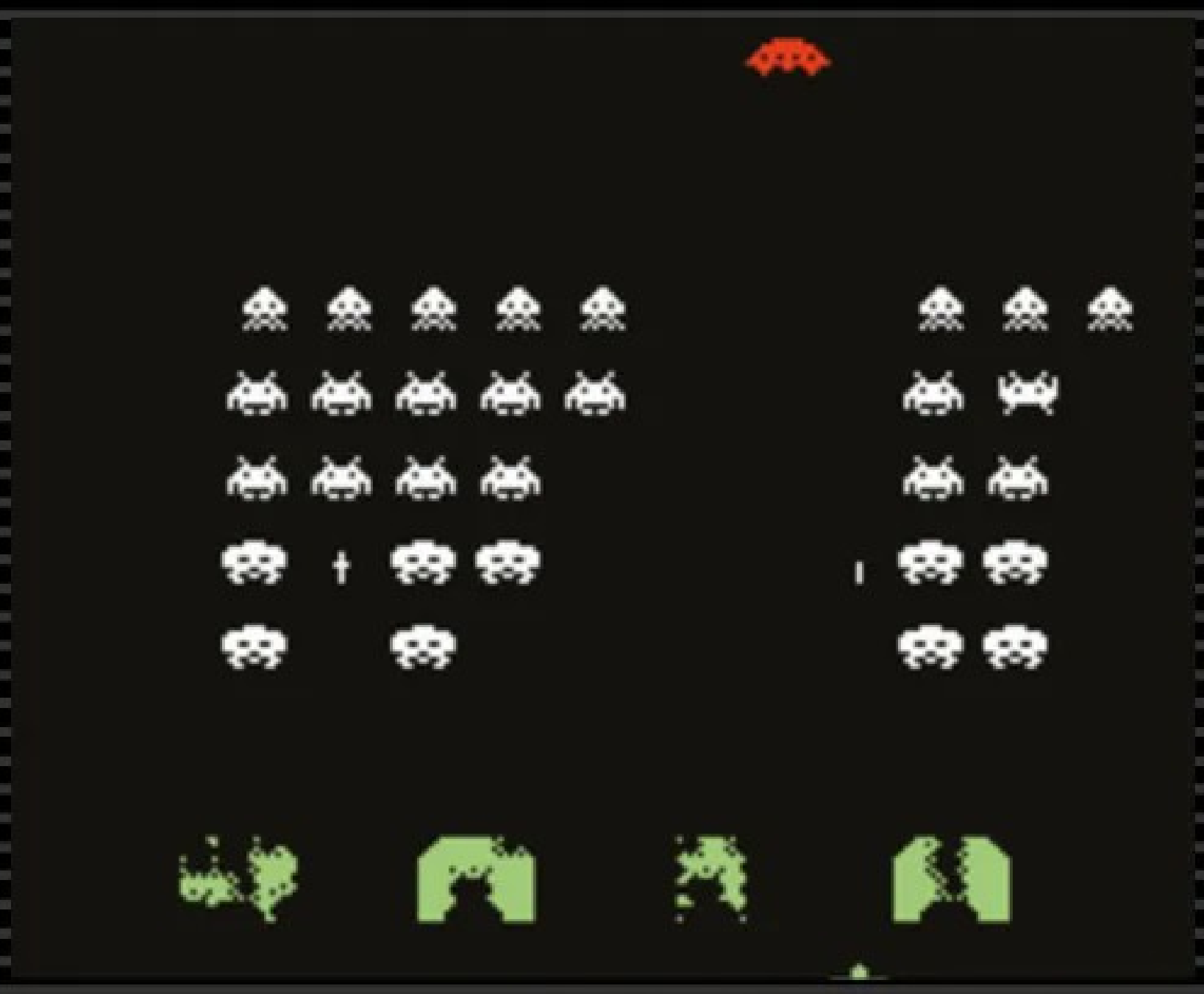
Despite hitting upon a strong theme straight away, Taito decided to meddle with the space invader design in later sequels. The first few were conservative in their changes, typically adding colour and an extra one or two underwater-style enemies. But later games deviated from the original design in some wild and crazy ways.

> "The invader is the ultimate go-to guy for capturing the idea of videogame culture in a single videogame image"

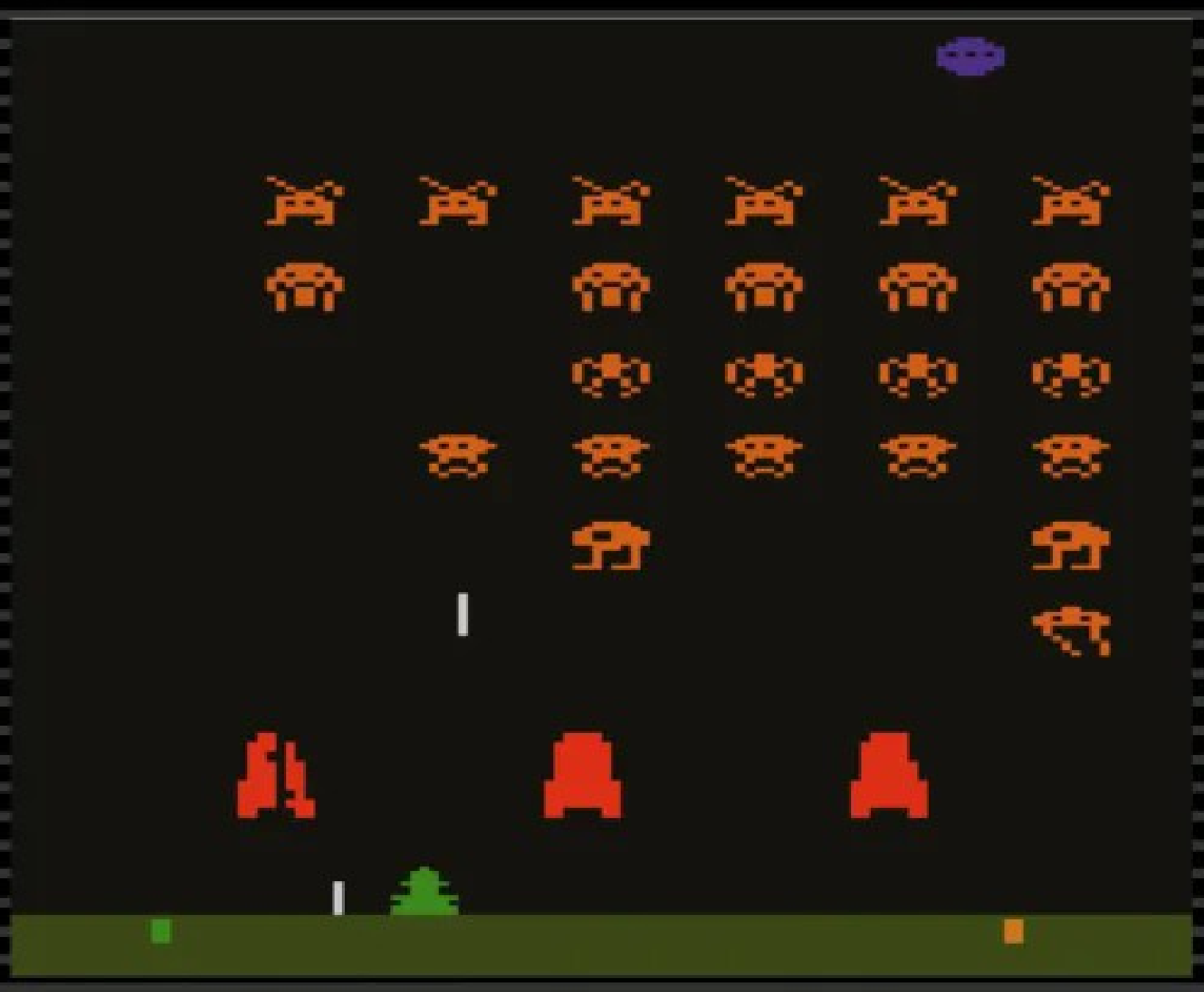
Sequels like *Space Invaders 95* and *Space Invaders DX* often start the game with the simple, iconic design and then quickly switch them out for much more detailed 16-bit style sprites. Crazy-looking invaders like boxing kittens or screaming blue lagomorphs pace down the screen, wowing with their unexpected appearance but somehow, despite their greater number of characteristics and broader personality, lacking the charm of their monochrome ancestors.

While we're pretty sure that no one remembers that enemy with love-hearts for pupils, no one could mistake the original space invader in a line-up. Maybe being first on the scene was its greatest achievement after all… *

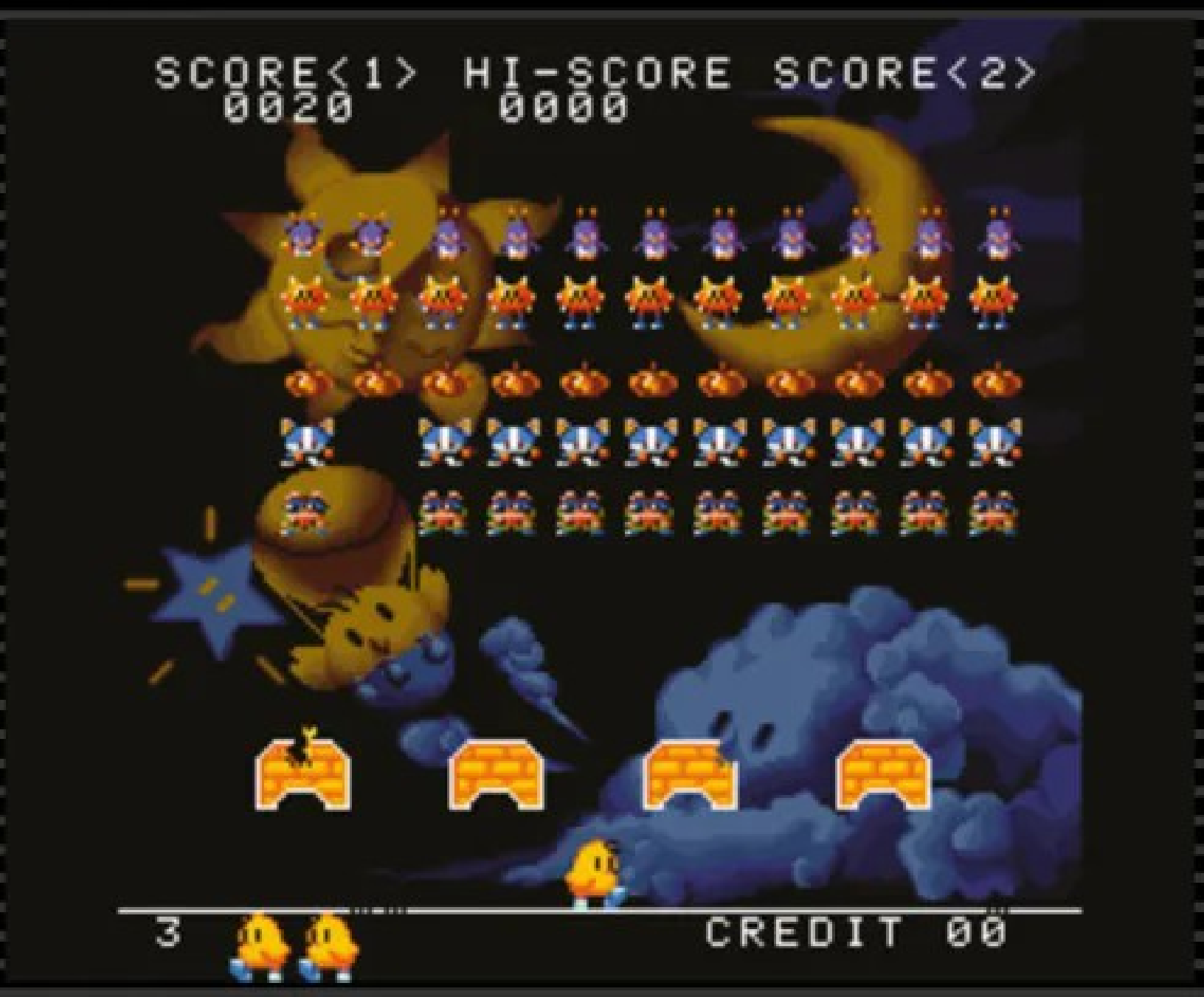
> MAGIC MOMENTS



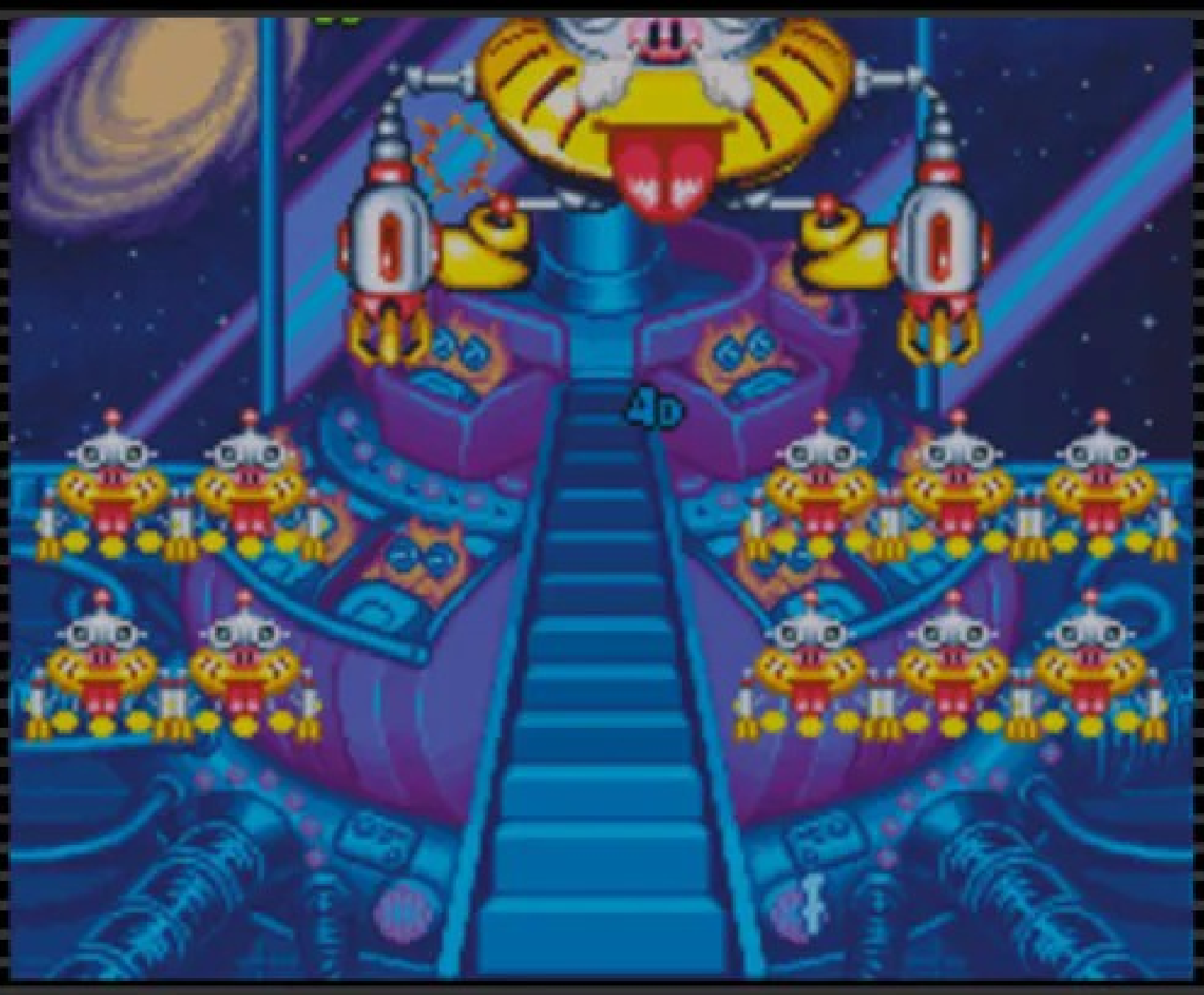
■ 1978: *Space Invaders* arrives in the arcade and causes a nationwide shortage of yen in Japan.



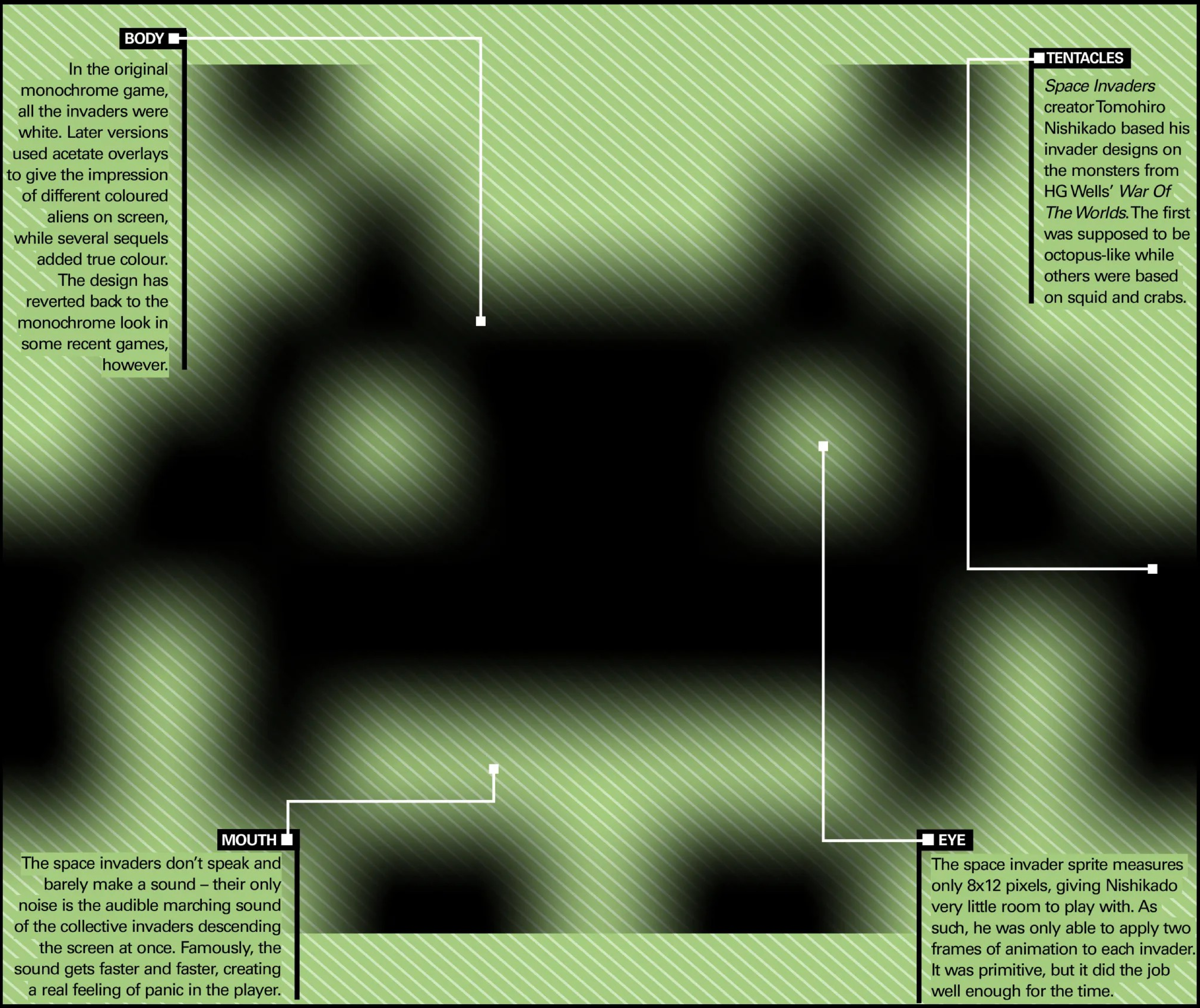
■ The invaders arrive on Atari VCS and spawn a console killer app in the process.



■ *Space Invaders DX* turns the player into *New Zealand Story*'s Tiki the Kiwi.



■ *Space Invaders 95* introduces all kinds of wacky aliens and new playable characters.



BODY

In the original monochrome game, all the invaders were white. Later versions used acetate overlays to give the impression of different coloured aliens on screen, while several sequels added true colour. The design has reverted back to the monochrome look in some recent games, however.

TENTACLES

Space Invaders creator Tomohiro Nishikado based his invader designs on the monsters from HG Wells' *War Of The Worlds*. The first was supposed to be octopus-like while others were based on squid and crabs.

MOUTH

The space invaders don't speak and barely make a sound – their only noise is the audible marching sound of the collective invaders descending the screen at once. Famously, the sound gets faster and faster, creating a real feeling of panic in the player.

EYE

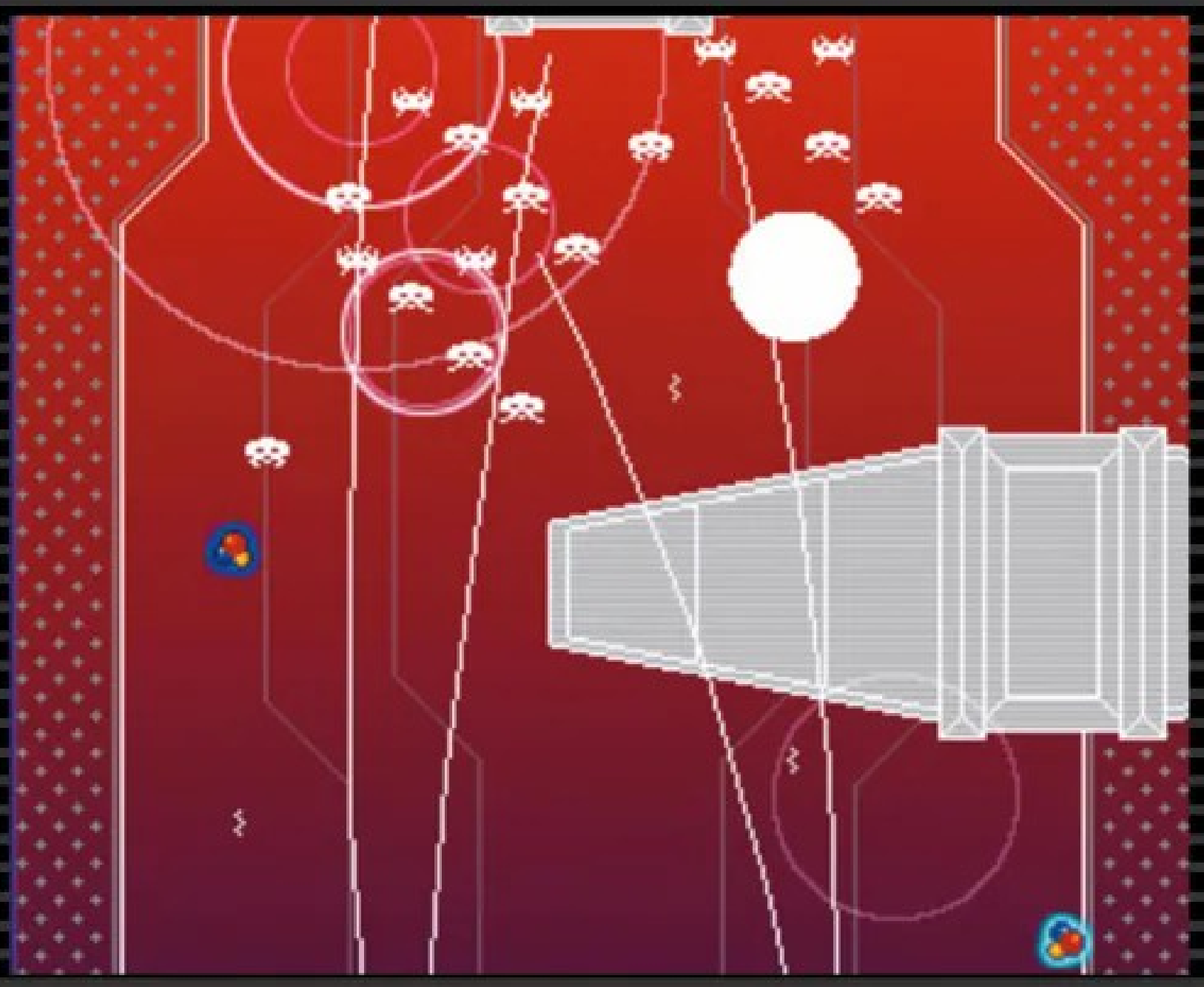
The space invader sprite measures only 8x12 pixels, giving Nishikado very little room to play with. As such, he was only able to apply two frames of animation to each invader. It was primitive, but it did the job well enough for the time.

■ PS2 spin-off *Invasion Day* put you in control of a human, defending earth.

SCORE 0000572650

■ XBLA's *Space Invaders Extreme* adds trippy Jeff Minter backgrounds. Groovy.

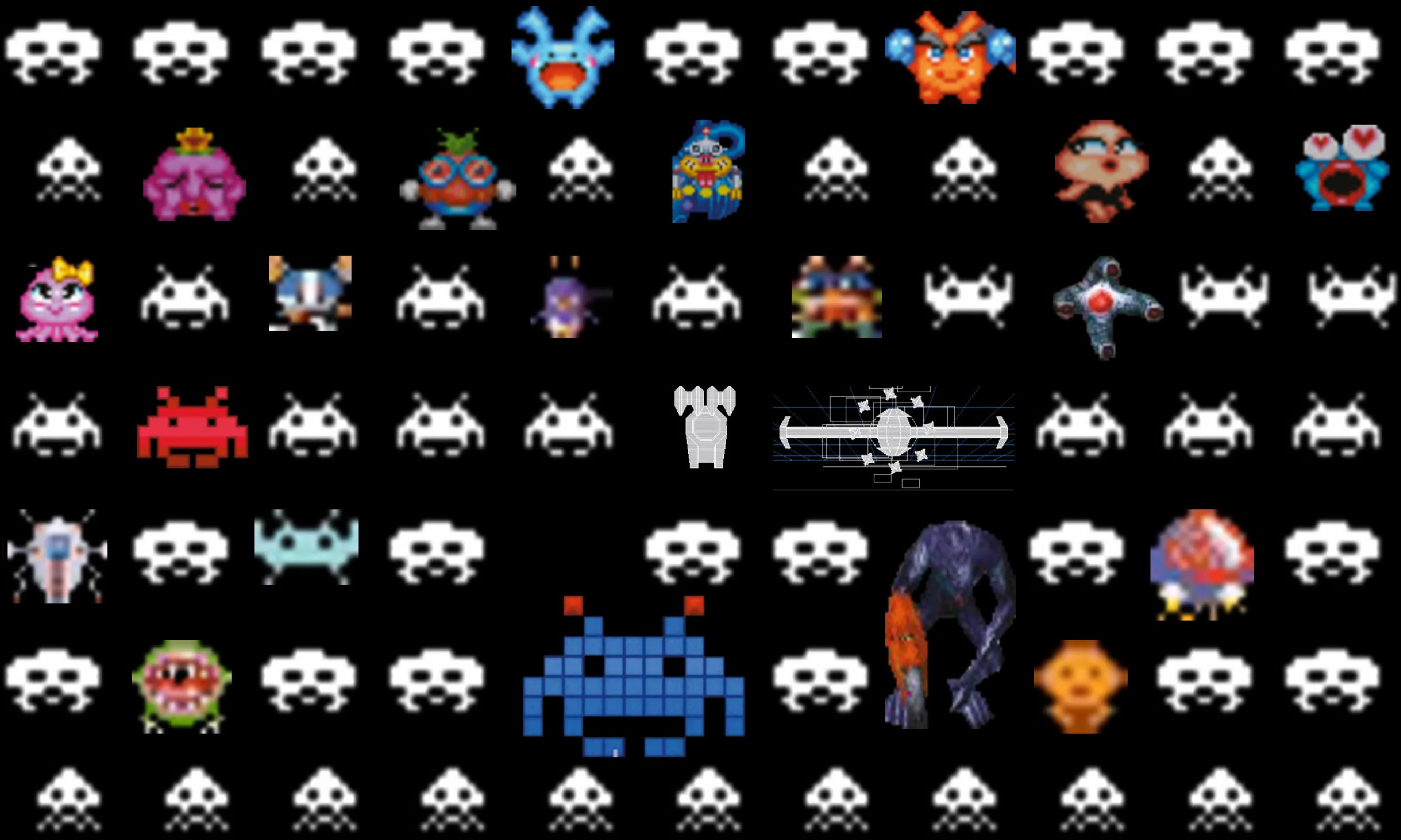
■ *Space Invaders Get Even* put you in control of the invaders for the first time.

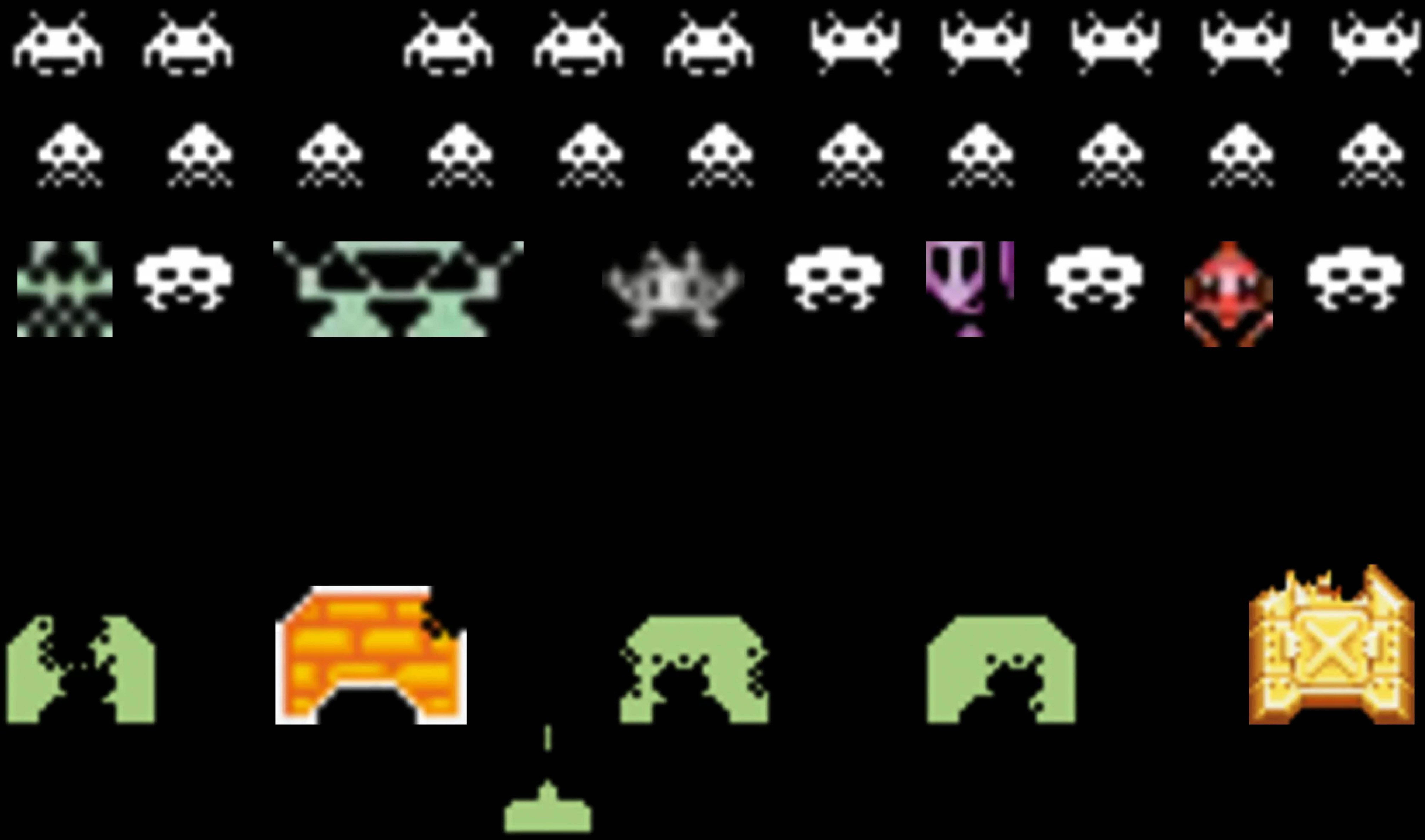


■ *Space Invaders Infinity Gene* arrives on iPhone and is the greatest game in the series.

THE INVADERS

THERE HAVE BEEN COUNTLESS SPACE INVADERS SEQUELS OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS AND MOST HAVE EVOLVED OR RE-DESIGNED THE ORIGINAL INVADER SPRITE DESIGN IN SOME WAY. HERE WE SHOW YOU SOME OF THE WILDEST VARIATIONS OF THE LITTLE SQUID FACE AND ALSO SHOW SOME OF THE BEST BASES THAT HAVE APPEARED ALONG THE WAY

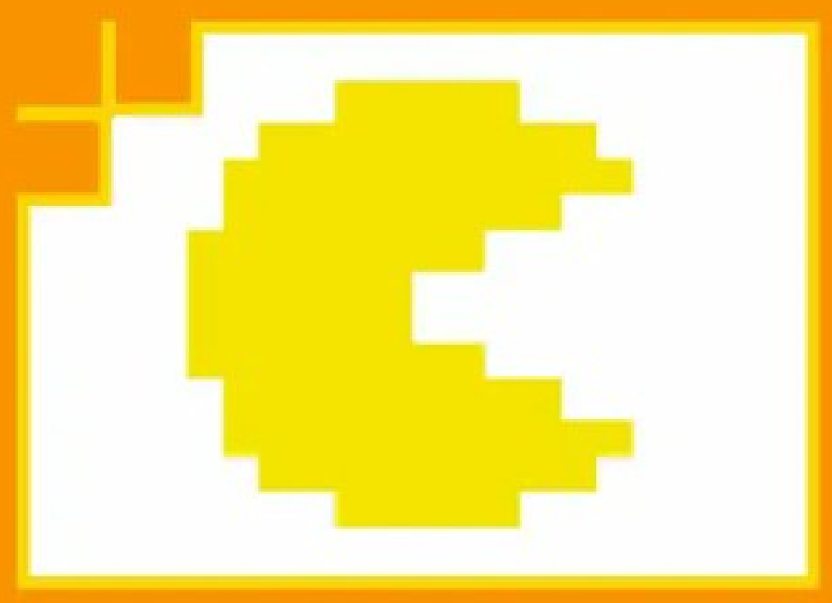




Reading from left to right and ignoring all the white characters: **[Invaders 1-8]** Space Invaders 95: The Attack Of The Lunar Loonies (1995) Arcade, PC **[Invaders 9-11]** Space Invaders DX (1993) Arcade **[Invader 12]** Space Invaders Evolution (2005) PSP **[Invader 13]** Space Invaders Extreme 2 (2009) DS **[Invaders 14-15]** Space Invaders Infinity Gene (2009) iPhone **[Invaders 16, 19, 20]** Return Of The Invaders (1985) Arcade **[Invader 17]** Space Invaders Part II (1980) Arcade **[Invader 18]** Space Invaders: Invasion Day (2002) PlayStation 2 **[Invader 21]** Space Invaders Extreme (2008) DS, PSP, Xbox 360 **[Invader 22]** Space Invaders: Revolution (2005) DS **[Invaders 23-24]** Space Invaders II (1980) Arcade **[Invader 25]** Space Invaders 90 (1990) Mega Drive **[Invaders 26-27]** Space Invaders X (1999) PlayStation, Game Boy Color **[Base 1]** Space Invaders DX (1993) Arcade **[Base 2]** Space Invaders 95: The Attack Of The Lunar Loonies (1995) Arcade, PC

PAC-MAN

Namco's yellow mascot is one of the most recognisible videogame creations of all time. Amazingly, it all started with a pizza…



ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** PAC-MAN
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** PAC-MAN
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** PAC-MAN: CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION 2
- **» FINEST HOUR:** PAC-MAN: CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION 2
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** GOBBLING GHOSTS

I had ordered a round pizza, and it was missing a piece. In a eureka moment, the shape of what is now Pac-Man flashed through my mind,” reveals Namco’s Toru Iwatani when regaling our sister magazine Retro Gamer about how he came up with the idea behind the character of Pac-Man. That Pac-Man’s beginning can be charted back to a pizza is a wonderful little irony. First, eating plays a very significant part in *Pac-Man*’s gameplay, with the titular yellow blob forced to munch his way through pills, Power Pellets, fruit and, occasionally, ghosts in the various mazes that make up the game. Second, Pac-Man is basically just a big yellow mouthpiece, a pair of lips with an insatiable appetite and a relentless eating machine that won’t stop until every last morsel on the screen has been consumed. Actually, put like that, it seems feasible that the enemy ghosts in the game could be trying to stop Pac-Man from eating everything in his path – maybe he’s a yellow harbinger of death? Finally, like a pizza, which is made of a simple mix of ingredients, Pac-Man is a very minimalist character – perhaps the most minimalist ever created. This is perhaps why he was met with such a lukewarm reception from Japanese gamers when he appeared in arcades back in 1980 – then under the name *Puck-Man*. It wasn’t until a year later, when Bally Midway snapped up the rights to license the game in the US, and the character’s name was changed to Pac-Man, that Iwatani’s creation made his mark on the videogames industry.

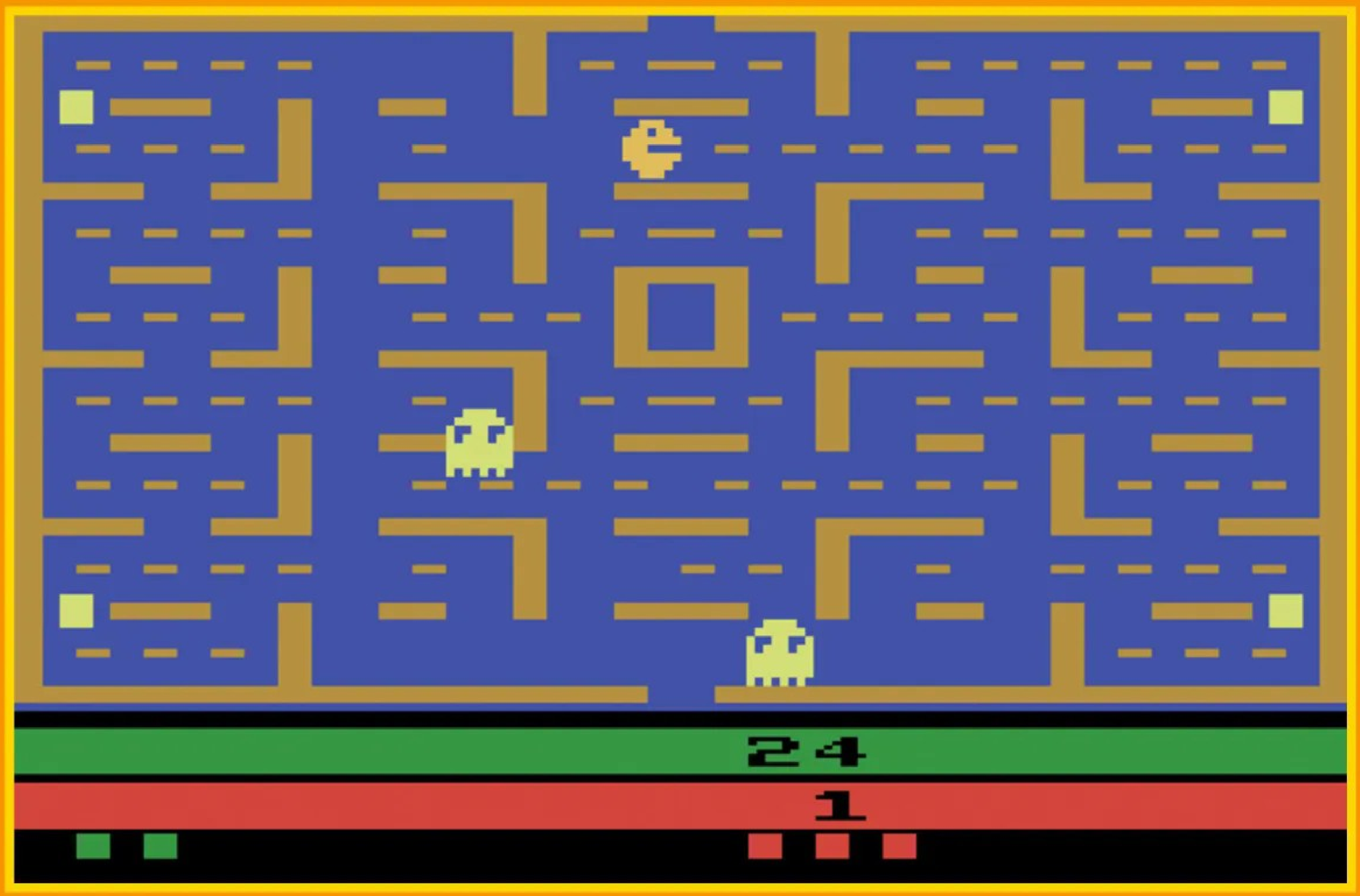
At the time *Pac-Man* landed in America, the popular trend in arcade games was in destroying waves of space invaders before they did the same to you. Of course, in those types of games your avatar was generally always a nondescript spaceship that made a pingy noise when it fired a rocket. There was very little in the way of personality, charm, character or likeability for gamers to really cling to. *Pac-Man* changed all that by pioneering a new wave of videogame, where the heroes were pushed to the fore, their names used in game titles and their faces splashed over cabinet art and game marquees. Furthermore, these heroes found appeal among all types of gamers – young and old, male and female.

In 1984, Namco released *Pac-Land* and the pill-popper received an official and really rather dramatic makeover. In response to the popularity of platform games in the mid-Eighties, Namco dropped the tight, maze scenario of the original coin-op, instead plonking its dot-chomping mascot in a side-scrolling platform game based on the popular Saturday-morning *Pac-Man* cartoon series by Hanna-Barbera. To prepare Pac-Man for the transition, Namco bestowed him with arms and legs, bright red boots, orange gloves, a red hat and even added facial features to his in-game sprite appearance. In most *Pac-Man* promotional literature and in the most recent *Pac-Man* titles, it’s the ‘limbed’ version of Pac-Man that is usually seen.

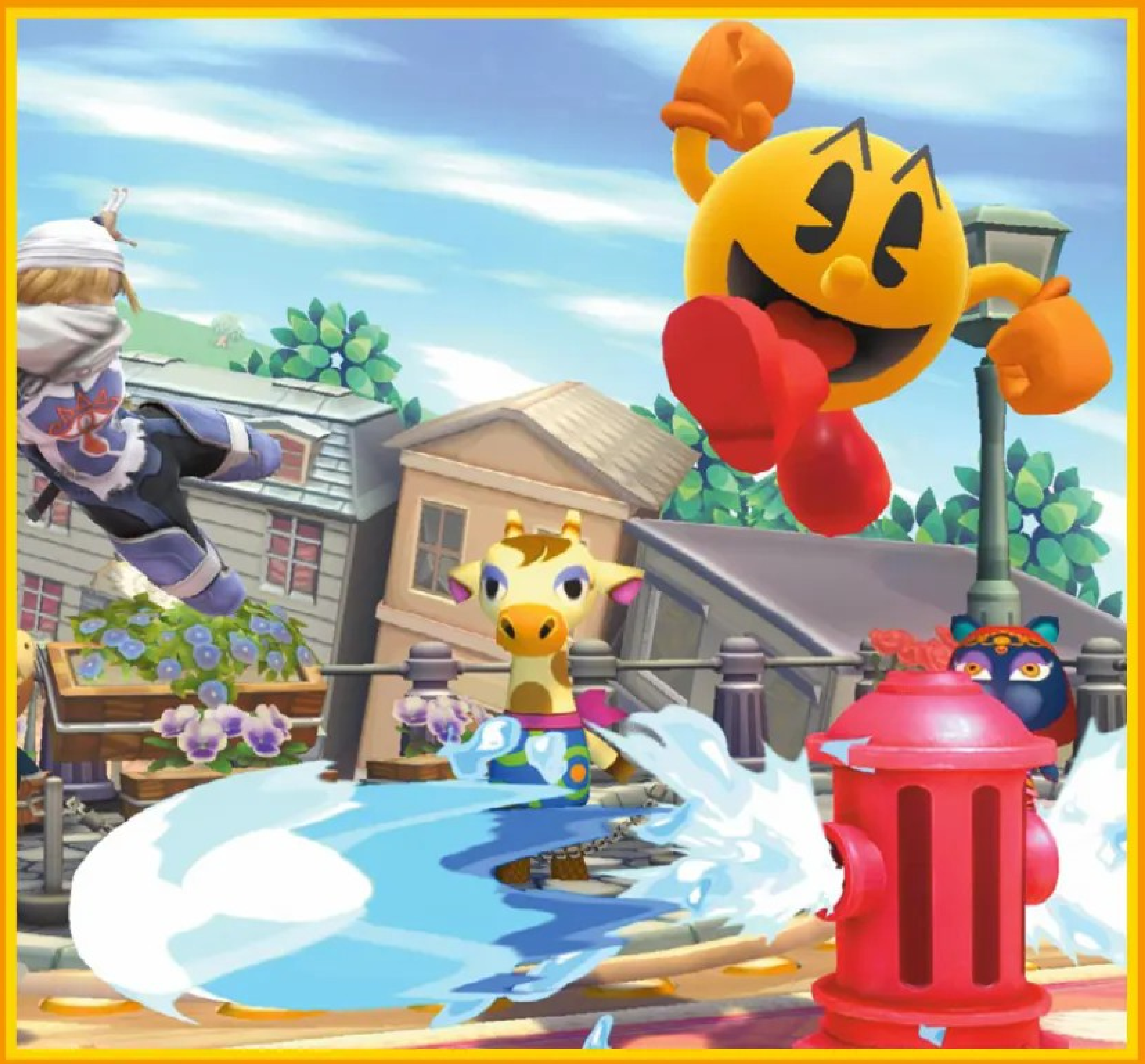
Pac-Man’s popularity and celebrity status has continued to rise. He has appeared in a dizzying array of conversions, sequels, hacks and spin-off games and even his own cartoon series. He's also one of gaming's most iconic characters. Don’t just take our word for it: according to the May 2008 report by the Davie Brown Celebrity Index, Pac-Man was recognised by an astonishing 94 per cent of US consumers, which puts him easily in line with Hollywood’s A-list. Furthermore, *Pac-Man* is also listed in the Guinness Book Of Records as the most successful videogame in history.

How Pac-Man has become one of the iconic videogame characters to grace our screens is no mystery. It’s a perfect combination of his simplicity, iconic looks and catchy name. Oh, and lest we forget the fact he also helped pioneer a new videogame genre, inspired other developers to be more innovative with their game ideas, and is also one of the first virtual celebrities, leading the way to what we now call the ‘videogame mascot’. Not bad for a half-eaten pizza. *

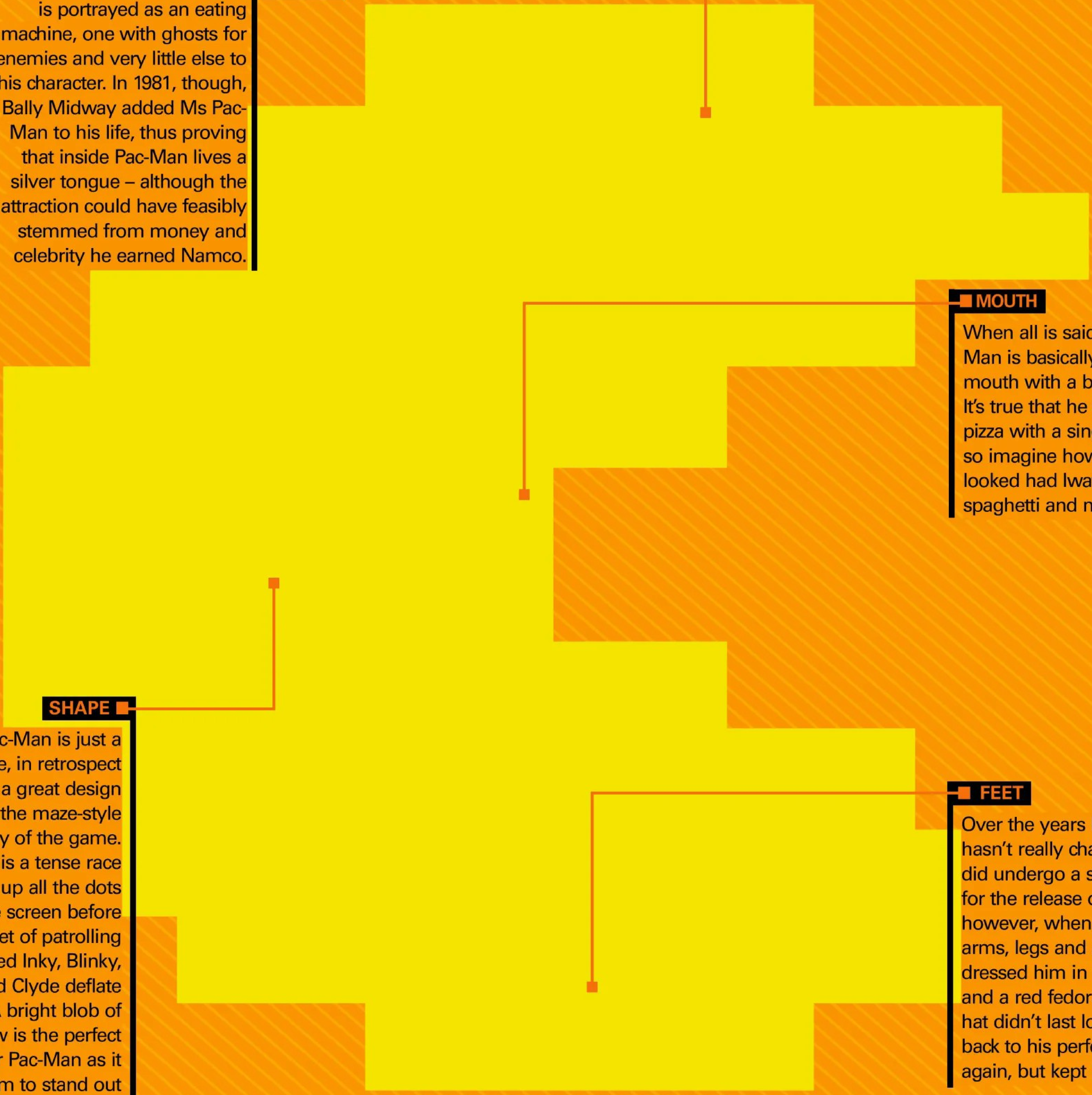
> **“In a May 2008 report, Pac-Man was recognised by an astonishing 94 per cent of US consumers”**



» *Pac-Man* on the Atari 2600 sold incredibly well but it wasn’t the most accurate of ports.



» Pac-Man is now a regular part of the *Super Smash Bros.* roster.



HEAD

In early games, Pac-Man is portrayed as an eating machine, one with ghosts for enemies and very little else to his character. In 1981, though, Bally Midway added Ms Pac-Man to his life, thus proving that inside Pac-Man lives a silver tongue – although the attraction could have feasibly stemmed from money and celebrity he earned Namco.

MOUTH

When all is said and done, Pac-Man is basically just a big yellow mouth with a bottomless appetite. It's true that he was based on a pizza with a single slice missing, so imagine how he might have looked had Iwatani ordered spaghetti and meatballs instead.

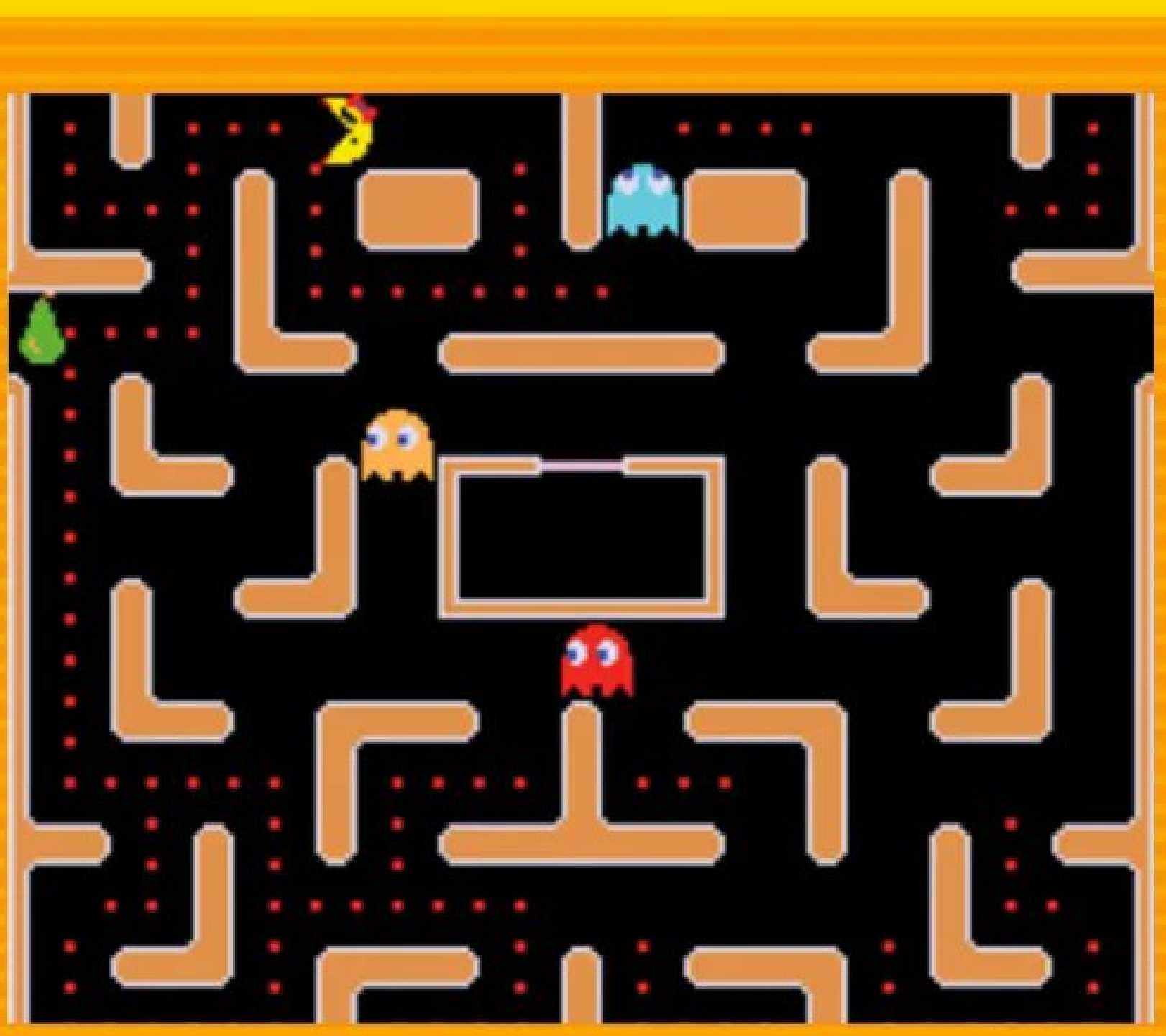
SHAPE

While Pac-Man is just a yellow circle, in retrospect it remains a great design choice for the maze-style gameplay of the game. *Pac-Man* is a tense race to gobble up all the dots on the screen before a quartet of patrolling ghosts called Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde deflate him. A bright blob of yellow is the perfect look for Pac-Man as it helps him to stand out brilliantly on the screen.

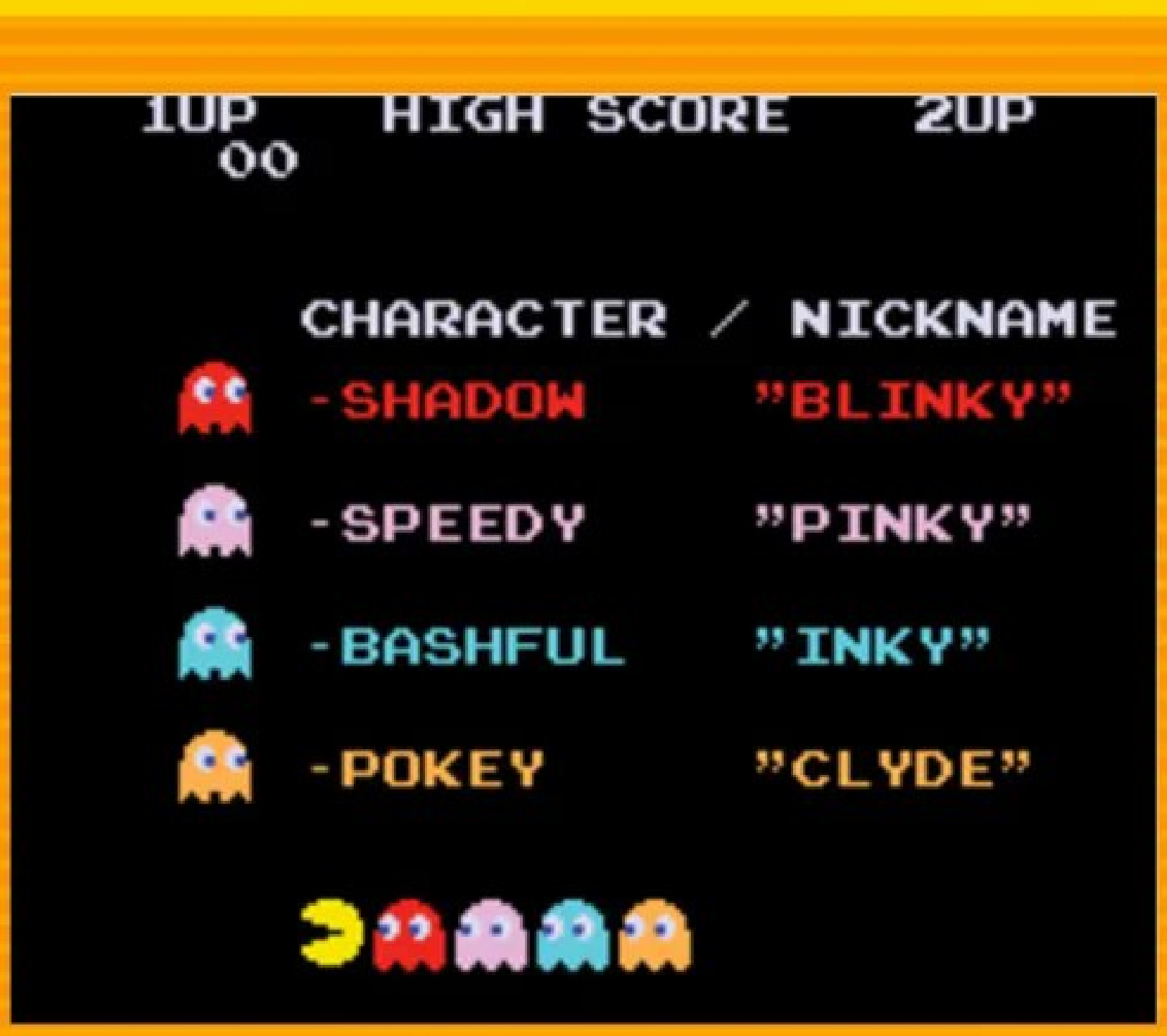
FEET

Over the years Pac-Man's look hasn't really changed that much. He did undergo a significant makeover for the release of *Pac-Land* however, when Namco gave him arms, legs and a nose job, and then dressed him in red Wellington boots and a red fedora. Thankfully, the hat didn't last long, and he's now back to his perfect spherical old self again, but kept his arms and legs.

> MAGIC MOMENTS

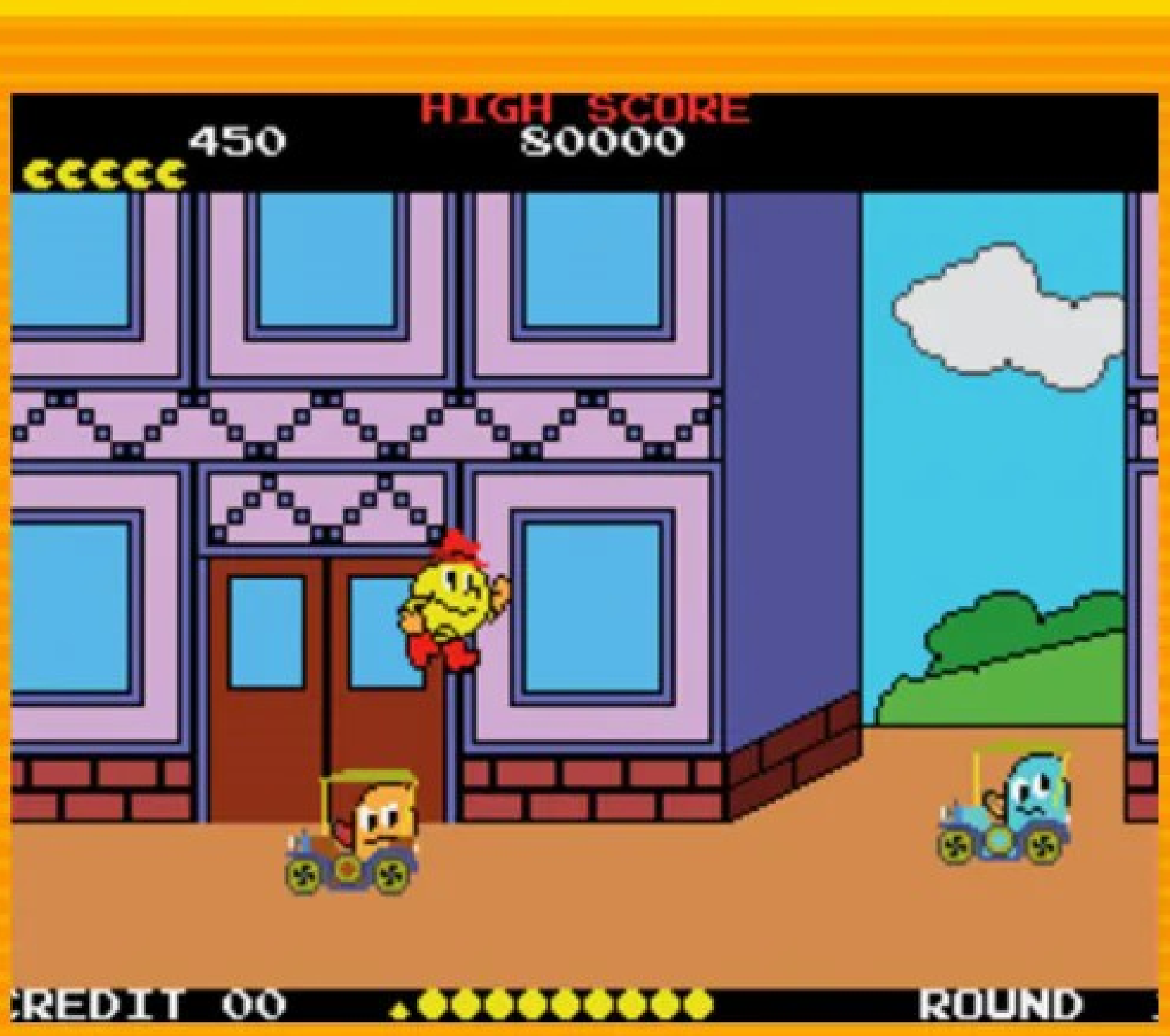


■ Pac-Man gets a nasty surprise when his wife gets her own game and almost upstages him.

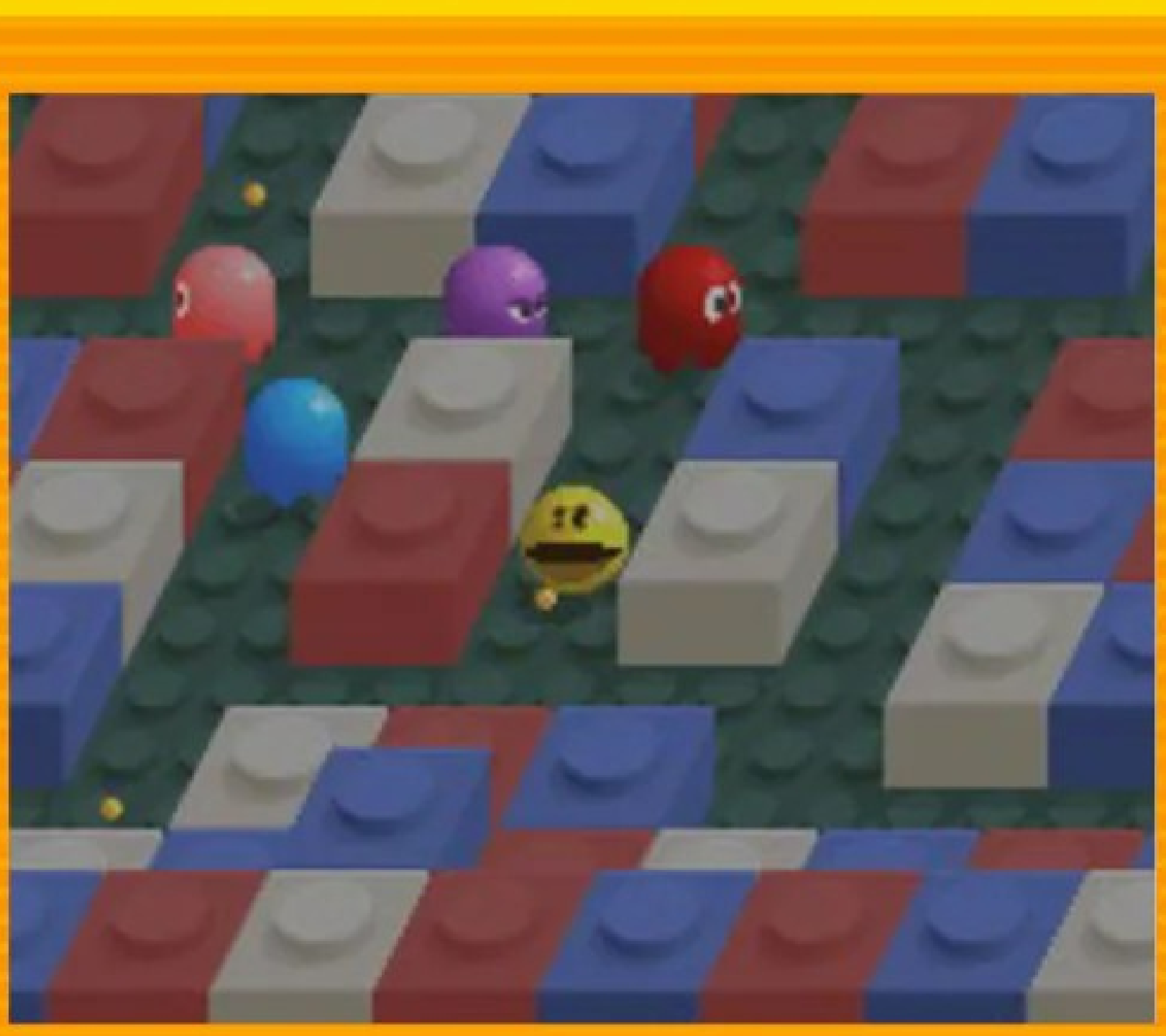


CHARACTER /	NICKNAME
-SHADOW	"BLINKY"
-SPEEDY	"PINKY"
-BASHFUL	"INKY"
-POKEY	"CLYDE"

■ *Pac-Man*'s flash screen introduces us to the game's four ghostly antagonists.



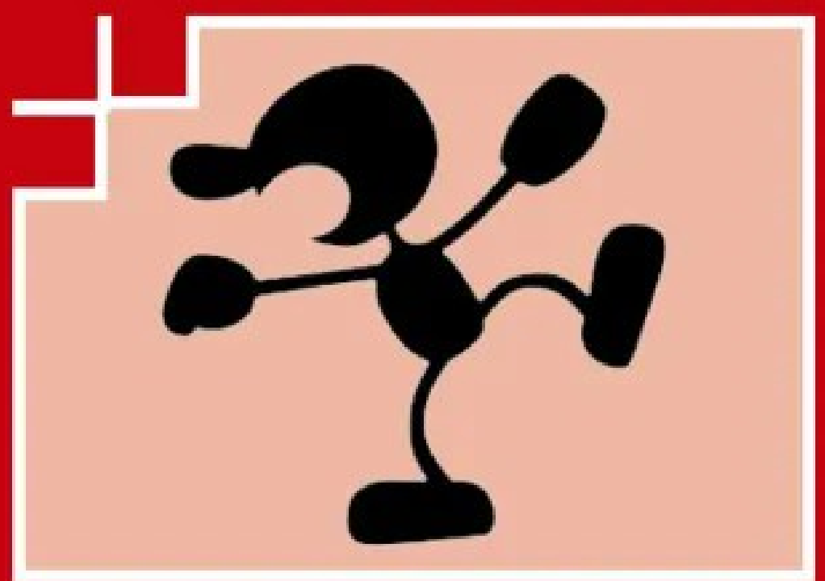
■ Fans finally got to see where Pac-Man spends his days when he's not in a maze.



■ The isometric *Pac-Mania* saw an eschewed take on the popular formula.

MR GAME & WATCH

Before mad apes, Italian plumbers, female bounty hunters and elfin warriors, there was Nintendo's battery-powered hero



ICON PROFILE

» **NAME:** MR GAME & WATCH
» **FIRST APPEARANCE:** BALL
» **LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
» **FINEST HOUR:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
» **NOTABLE FOR:** LOOKING WEIRD

Mario. Yoshi. Link. Samus. Kirby. Donkey Kong. All stand as proof that Nintendo is the master when it comes to creating videogame characters. The last three decades have seen Nintendo produce some of the most successful, enduring and recognised heroes to ever grace the gaming world. But while Nintendo is famous for its impeccable hit ratio when creating characters, its earliest hero, *Mr. Game & Watch*, failed to capture the same level of celebrity, despite being the first character to mascot his own series, rub shoulders with the likes of Mickey Mouse, Snoopy and Popeye, and play a pivotal role in the advent of portable gaming.

In 1980, while trying to enter the North American coin-op market with the games *Sheriff* and *Radar Scope* (the latter standing as Shigeru Miyamoto's earliest project), Nintendo released a series of handheld LCD games designed by Gunpei Yokoi. Game & Watch was Nintendo's first foray into mobile gaming, and owing to their long battery life and design, offered true portability for the first time in the games industry.

Mr Game & Watch was a recurring character who appeared in a vast number of the sixty Game & Watch titles released by Nintendo between 1980 and 1991, playing either the central hero (as in the games *Ball*, *Chef*, *Judge*) or as a peripheral character the player would need to save or protect (*Manhole*, *Fire*). And while it was *Donkey Kong* that would catapult Nintendo to bigger things – the 1981 smash was one of the first arcade games to replace nondescript spaceships and aliens with proper characters – it was through Mr Game & Watch that Nintendo first trialled this innovative approach to videogame design.

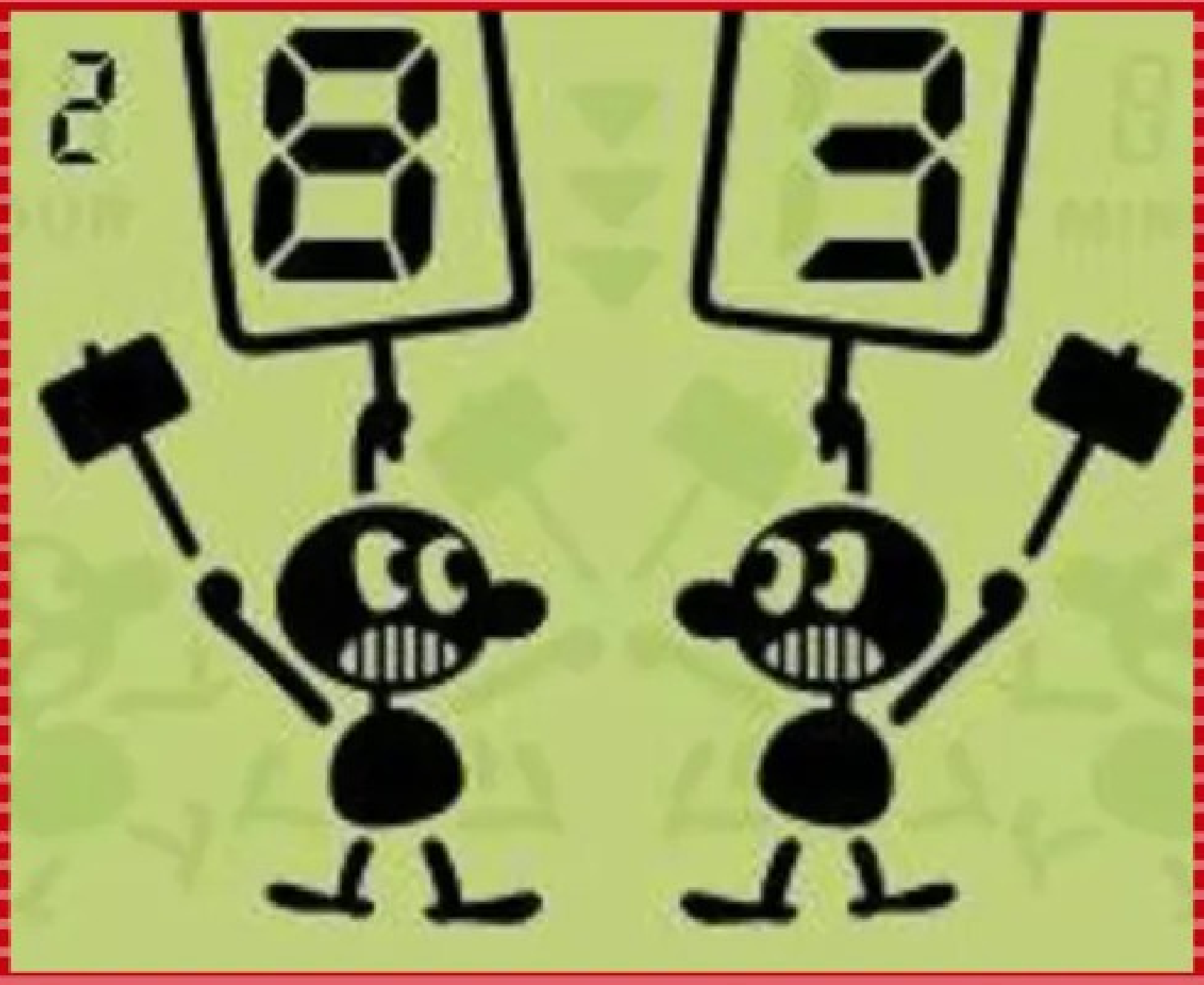
As it did when coming up with the look of Mario, Nintendo designed Mr Game & Watch around the limitations of the character's host hardware. The unsophisticated LCD technology that powered its Game & Watch games didn't allow for the full-colour, detailed sprites of the arcades, so Nintendo was faced with the tricky task of shaping liquid crystal blobs into something resembling an identifiable personality. The only realistic option was to create a stick man.

A basic humanoid shape, made up of a round black body, thin arms and legs ending in bulbous extremities, and a round face with a large gaping mouth and big round nose: Mr Game & Watch's design was as simple and as functional as the Game & Watch units themselves. Nonetheless, his rudimentary look dovetailed perfectly with the simplistic nature of the games, while also making him easily distinguishable against the handheld's diminutive displays. Furthermore, Mr Game & Watch's generic characteristics made him the ultimate everyman character, a faceless, versatile hero that could adapt to any game scenario. Interestingly, this versatile approach to character design nearly became a much more important part of Nintendo's creative process, according to a recent Iwata Asks interview with Shigeru Miyamoto. Mario, he revealed, was originally called 'Mr Video' because he was supposed to appear in every single Nintendo game in different roles, just like our LCD chum.

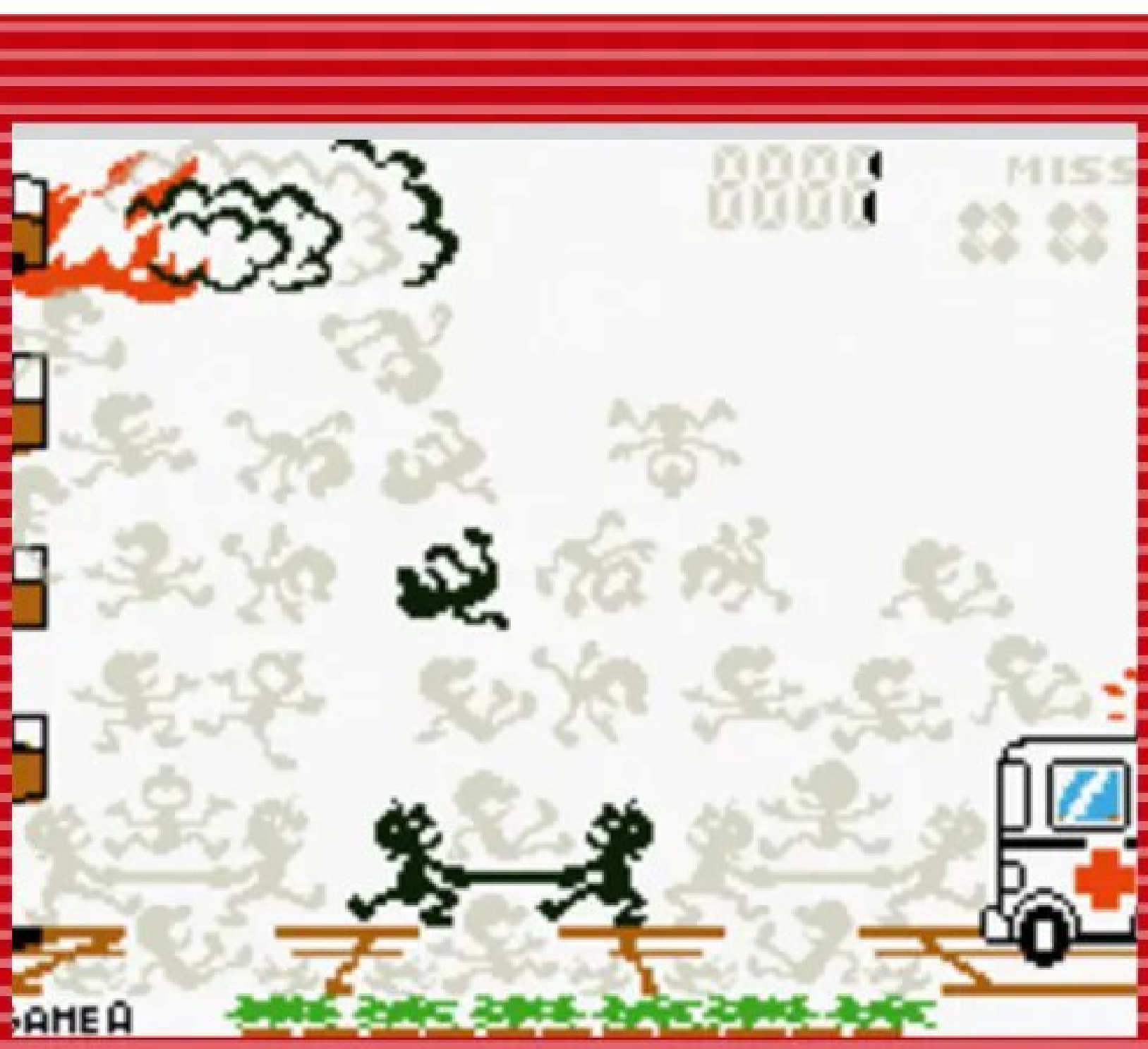
Mr Video never came to be, however, and Nintendo soon created a whole host of popular characters in the form of Mario, Link and Kirby. These colourful, vibrant characters quickly made Mr Game & Watch look dreary by comparison, and these new characters did him no favours by appearing in Game & Watch titles of their own, muscling in on his modest gaming patch.

In 2001, following some low-key reappearances in the *Game & Watch Gallery* titles, Mr Game & Watch was given another chance after Nintendo dusted him off to appear in the *Super Smash Bros.* series. Nintendo embellished the crude makeup of the character, and, in a nod to his past games, based his special moves on old Game & Watch titles. Furthermore, the trophies in the game revealed some backstory on the character, explaining that he's made of a strange primordial substance and hails from a place called Superflat World. This new lease of life reinforced Mr Game & Watch's cult appeal, but also highlighted just how blank a slate the original design was – while underscoring how far Nintendo has come. Beside the developer's evergreen heroes, it's clear that Mr Game & Watch was hardly a character at all, but more an icon of the LCD age. An embodiment of the Game & Watch brand, he's as close at it comes to being a playable logo. Take that, Mario! ✱

> MAGIC MOMENTS



■ The close-up view of *Judge* afforded a more detailed look at Mr Game & Watch. Look, teeth!

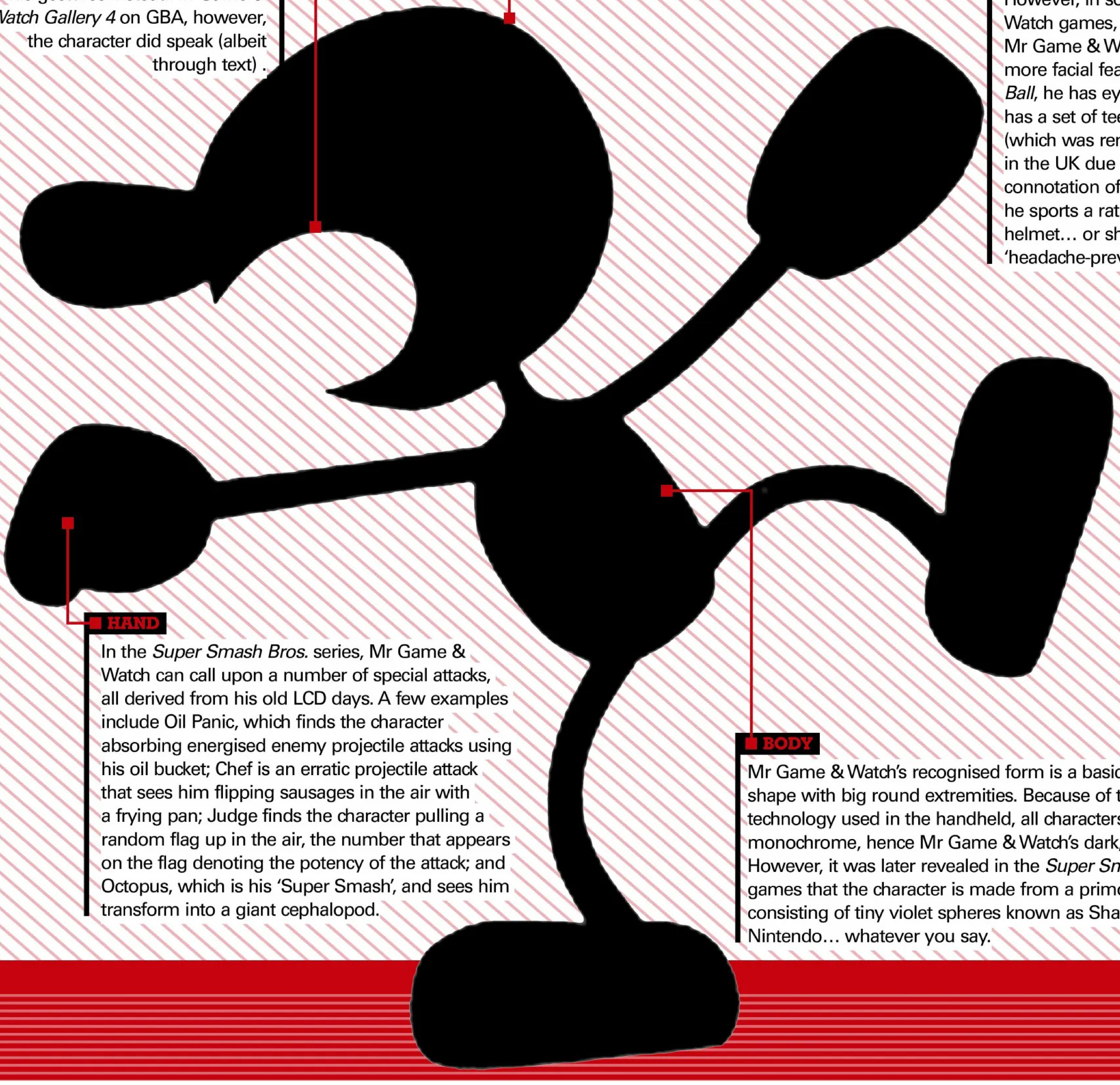


■ *Fire* sees the character getting his oily hide saved by a pair of firemen.

■ The character was revived by Nintendo when he appeared in *Super Smash Bros. Melee*.

GAME BOY ADVANCE
GALLERY 4
6 GAMES IN 1!
EVERYONE

■ Mr Game & Watch featured on the Game Boy thanks to the *Game & Watch Gallery* series.



MOUTH

Knowing the simple technology of the G&W couldn't give Mr Game & Watch a voice, Nintendo used bleeps and tones to accompany his gestures instead. In *Game & Watch Gallery 4* on GBA, however, the character did speak (albeit through text) .

HEAD

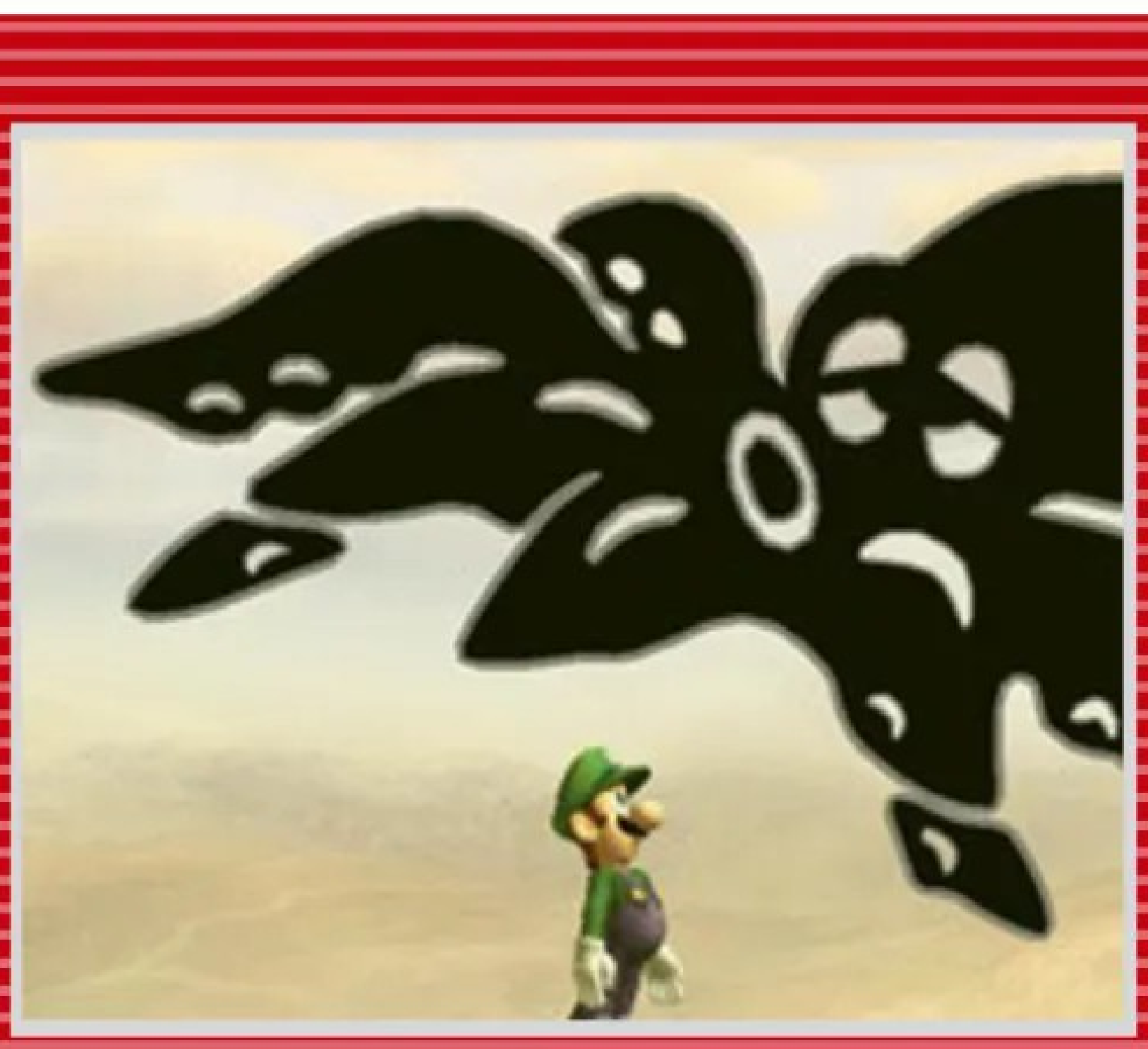
Mr Game & Watch's solid blob head and big protruding nose is the look that most people associate with the character. However, in some early Game & Watch games, Nintendo blessed Mr Game & Watch with a few more facial features. In the game *Ball*, he has eyes; in *Judge*, he has a set of teeth; and in *Helmet* (which was renamed Headache in the UK due to the sexual connotation of the original title) he sports a rather natty safety helmet… or should that be 'headache-prevention hat'?

HAND

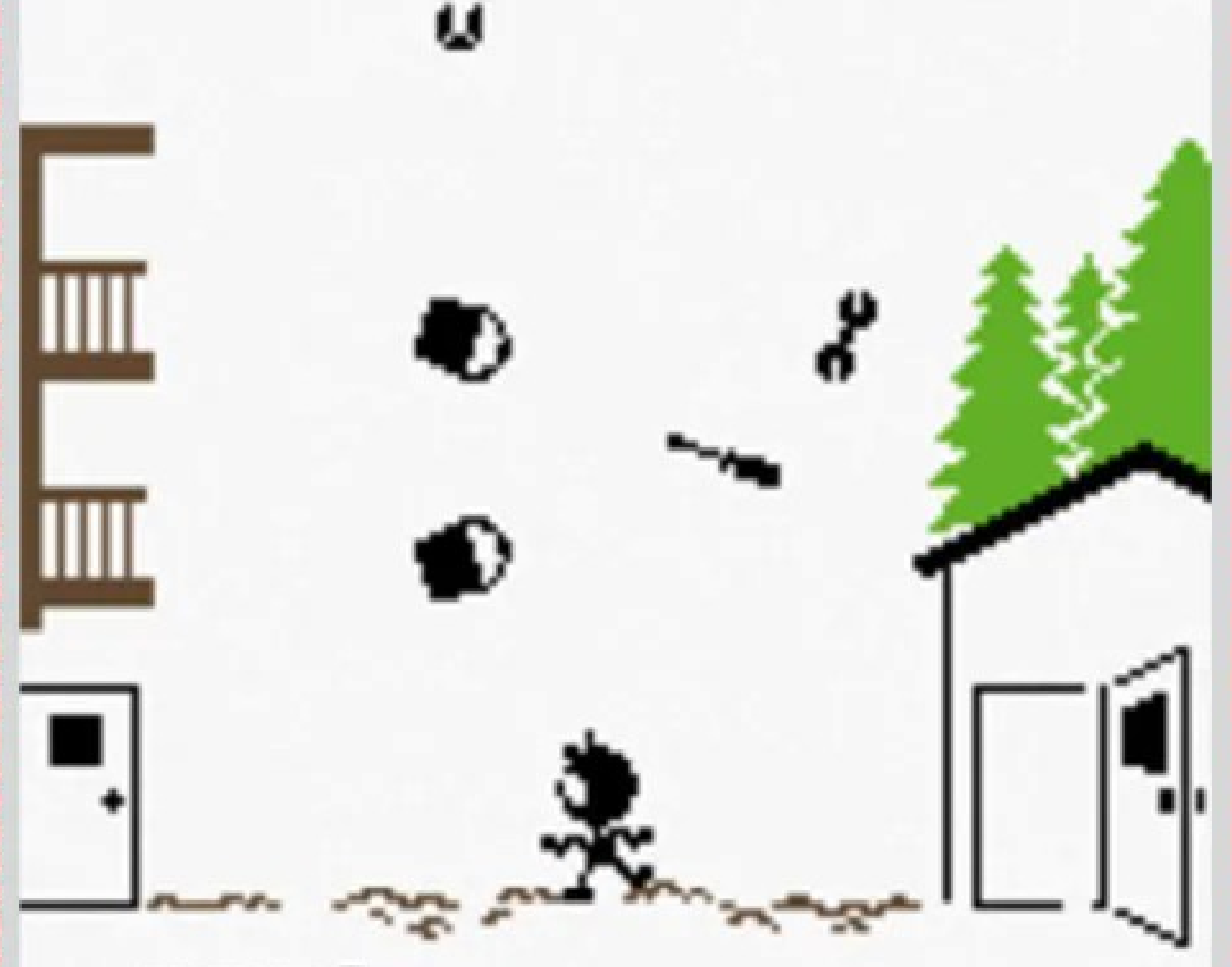
In the *Super Smash Bros.* series, Mr Game & Watch can call upon a number of special attacks, all derived from his old LCD days. A few examples include Oil Panic, which finds the character absorbing energised enemy projectile attacks using his oil bucket; Chef is an erratic projectile attack that sees him flipping sausages in the air with a frying pan; Judge finds the character pulling a random flag up in the air, the number that appears on the flag denoting the potency of the attack; and Octopus, which is his 'Super Smash', and sees him transform into a giant cephalopod.

BODY

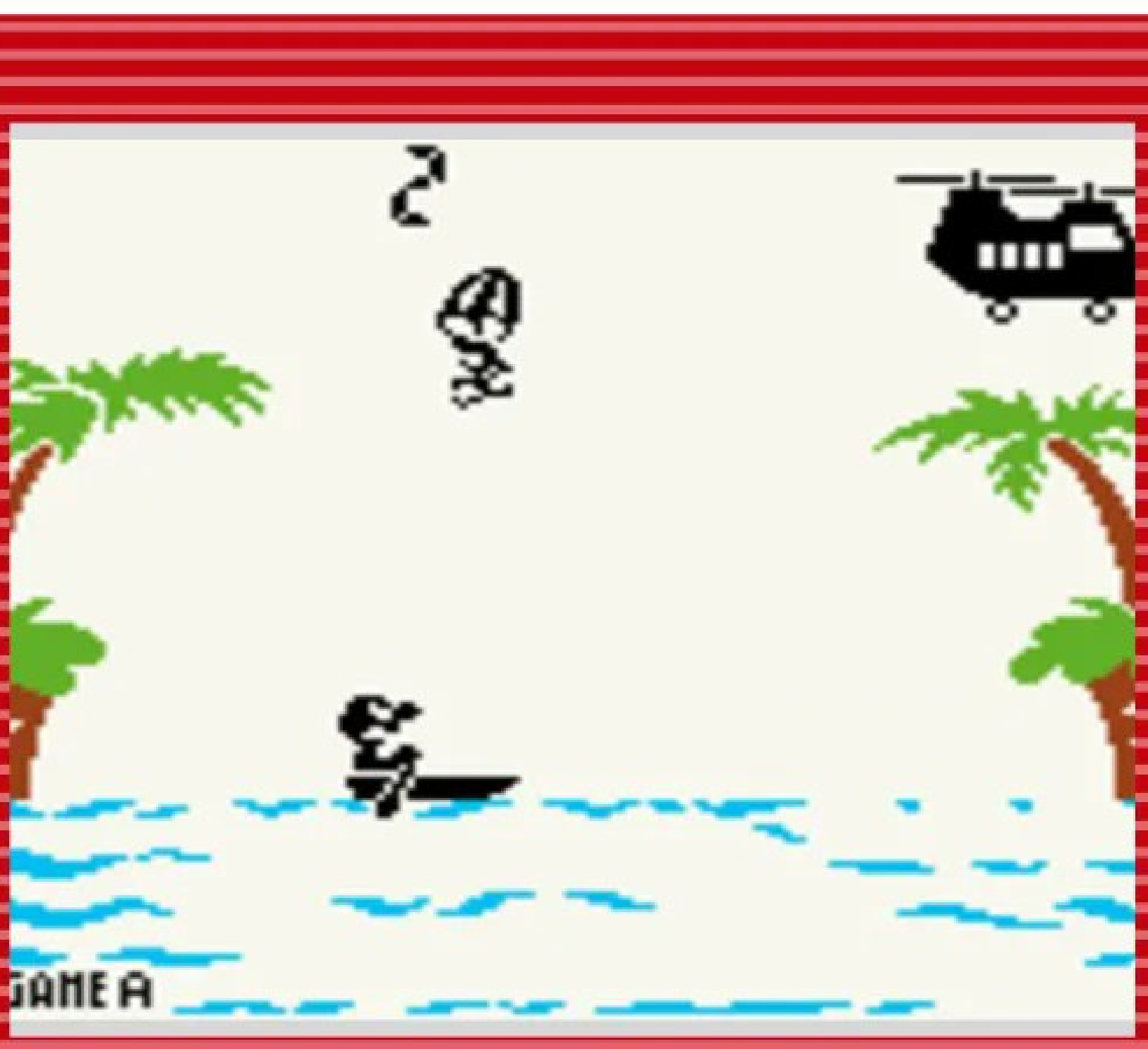
Mr Game & Watch's recognised form is a basic human shape with big round extremities. Because of the crude LCD technology used in the handheld, all characters and objects were monochrome, hence Mr Game & Watch's dark, inky appearance. However, it was later revealed in the *Super Smash Bros.* games that the character is made from a primordial substance, consisting of tiny violet spheres known as Shadow Bugs. Okay, Nintendo… whatever you say.



■ Mr Game & Watch's Final Smash move in *SSB* sees him change into a giant octopus.



■ Mr Game & Watch battles to reach his outside loo while avoiding a shower of tools in *Helmet*.



■ Our hero catches falling parachutists as they jump into shark-infested waters.

MARIO THE JUGGLER
GAME & WATCH
LEFT
RIGHT
Nintendo

■ *Ball* starred Mr Game & Watch, but he was replaced in the 1991 remake, *Mario The Juggler*.

GAME & WATCH'S UNSUNG HEROS

Though he was designed to adapt to any role, Mr Game & Watch didn't actually appear in all sixty of Nintendo's handhelds. New characters would start to muscle in on his territory. Like these fellows…

1. CHEF

Variants: **Widescreen**
Year released: **1981**
Play it on: **G&W Gallery 2 and 4, Cooking Guide: Can't Decide What To Eat? (as an unlockable), DSiWare**

We're not entirely sure that this isn't just Mr Game & Watch in a chef's outfit, considering the characters do look quite similar and Chef is one of the Mr G&W's specials in *SSB* (though so is Octopus) but, regardless, this quirky game deserves recognition. The player assumes the role of a harassed chef who must cook various items of food by flipping them into the air using a frying pan. If that doesn't sound like the worst kitchen nightmare, you also had to watch out for an annoying cat who would stab at the food with a fork, hold it up and then randomly release it to mess up your timing.

2. FIRE

Variant: **Silver/Widescreen**
Year released: **1980**
Play it on: **G&W Gallery 1, 3 and 4**

This lighthearted take on a bleak premise found players assuming the role of two firemen as they save people jumping from a burning building - players had to juggle multiple people in the air using a trampoline and get them to the safety of the ambulance parked at the other side of the screen. This G&W game actually features an appearance by Mr Game & Watch, who goes all Agent Smith by cloning himself and playing the role of the hapless victims. It's also one of the most popular G&W games, and was spoofed brilliantly in *Earthworm Jim 2*, where it formed the inspiration for a minigame that saw Jim protecting falling Peter Puppies using a large marshmallow.

3. OCTOPUS

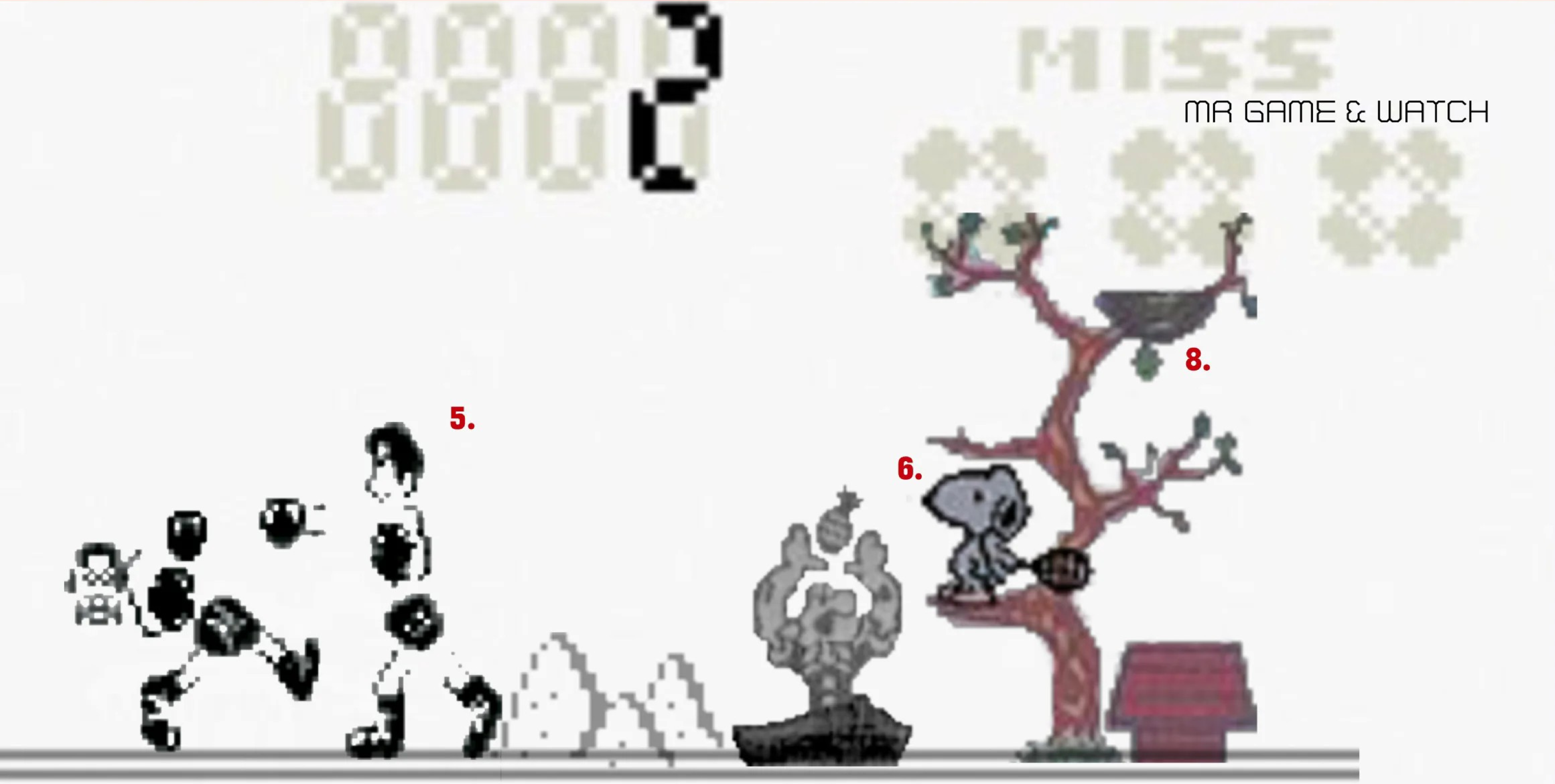
Variant: **Widescreen**
Year released: **1981**
Play it on: **G&W Gallery 1, 4 and G&W Collection 2**

The uncomplicated brilliance of the Game & Watch games can be summed up perfectly with *Octopus*, which features a simple two-button control scheme (one button to steer your man left, another right) and easy-to-grasp gameplay. Playing the role of a deep sea diver (who looks a little like an LCD version of a Big Daddy) you must dive into the murky drink and make your way to a treasure chest guarded by a giant octopus, being careful to avoid his wandering tentacles. Once the booty is collected, you then have to make your way back to the boat. *Octopus* is the inspiration behind Mr Game & Watch's Final Smash move in the *SSB* games.

4. VERMIN

Variant: **Silver**
Year released: **1980**
Play it on: **Game Boy Gallery, G&W Collection 2 and DSiWare**

In *Vermin* you play someone with an unhealthy passion for mole-murder. Standing over the entrances to five mole homes, you position your man over them, so whenever a poor mole pokes his head up to find out what the weather's doing, he's in prime position to have his poor life ended by a violent hammer blow to the head. In fact, the guy you play actually takes so much pride in his work that he dual-wields, holding a hammer in each hand to ensure maximum mole mutilation. Joking aside, the game is basically just Nintendo's own pocket-sized LCD take on the popular 1971 coin-op attraction *Whac-A-Mole*.



5. BOXING

Variant: **Micro Vs System**
Year released: **1984**
Play it on: **G&W Gallery 4**

It doesn't take Barry McGuigan to realise that beat-'em-ups have come a long way since this primitive LCD game, which gives a crude performance of two men fighting each other while wearing very thick mittens. In the context of G&W games though, this portable beat-'em-up actually isn't all that bad. Viewed from a side-on perspective, you assume the role of a broken marionette, and with five bars of health must knock down your opponent using either body blows or jabs to the head. The name was later changed to *Punch-Out!!* in America to tie in with Nintendo's popular NES boxing game.

6. POPEYE

Variant: **Widescreen/Panorama/ Tabletop**
Year released: **1983**

Originally, Miyamoto wanted Popeye characters to appear in *Donkey Kong*, but couldn't get the license from King Features. However, because of the global success of its oddly named arcade game, Nintendo had no struggle obtaining it afterwards, hence the existence of the *Popeye* coin-op (1981), NES conversion (1983) and this Game & Watch title. While the arcade game played similarly to *Donkey Kong*, this version is quite a bit different. It finds the player controlling Popeye, as he sits in a rowboat trying to catch litter being tossed to him by Olive Oil while avoiding getting punched or smacked with a mallet by Bluto - weird but oddly captivating.

7. MICKEY MOUSE

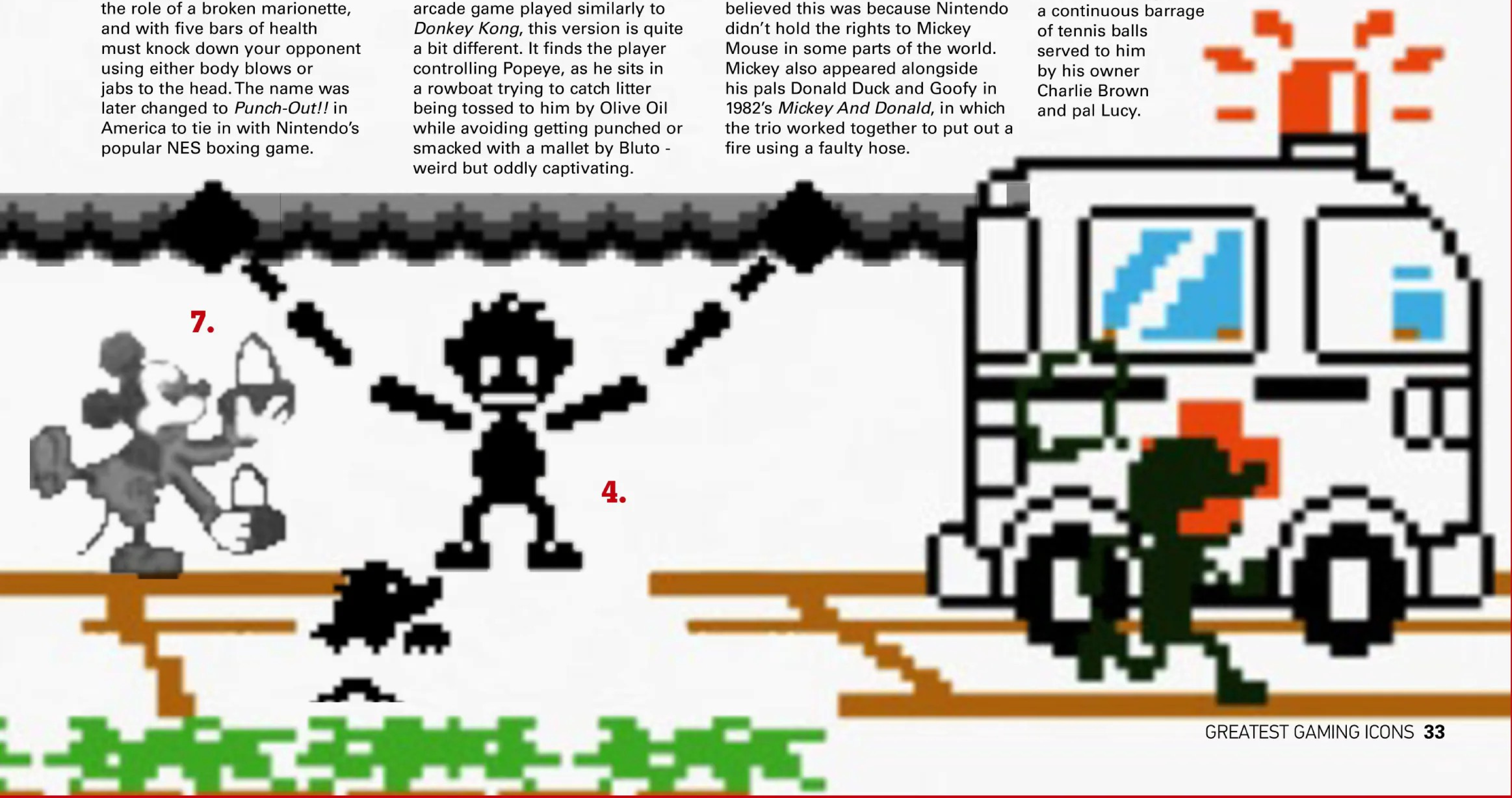
Variant: **Wide screen**
Year Released: **1981**

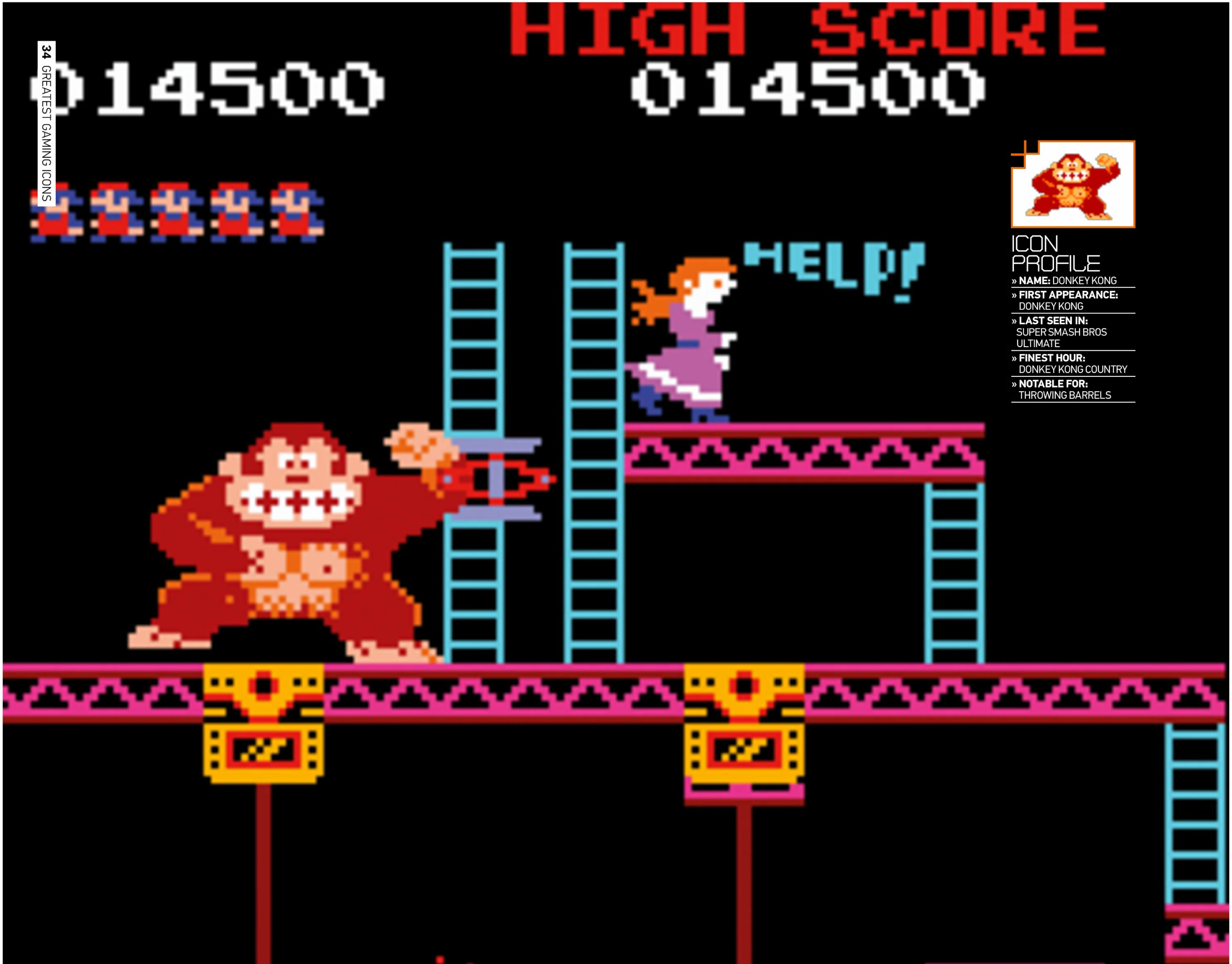
Disney's mascot, Mickey Mouse actually appeared in two Game & Watch games. The first one, titled *Mickey Mouse*, saw the squeaky-voiced one collecting eggs from four separate hens (we thought mice ate cheese), with the player losing a life if one is missed. The game is very similar to another Game & Watch game called *Egg*. In fact, it's essentially the same game, but replaces Mickey with a fox - it's believed this was because Nintendo didn't hold the rights to Mickey Mouse in some parts of the world. Mickey also appeared alongside his pals Donald Duck and Goofy in 1982's *Mickey And Donald*, in which the trio worked together to put out a fire using a faulty hose.

8. SNOOPY

Variant: **Table Top/Panorama**
Year Released: **1982**

As well as Mickey Mouse and Popeye, Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts* characters were also licensed by Nintendo in the early Eighties to appear in their own series of Game & Watch titles. Not to be confused with the Game Boy Color game of the same name, as this portable iteration is far more simplistic, *Snoopy Tennis* found players helping Schulz's hugely popular two-toned beagle return a continuous barrage of tennis balls served to him by his owner Charlie Brown and pal Lucy.




014500
HIGH SCORE
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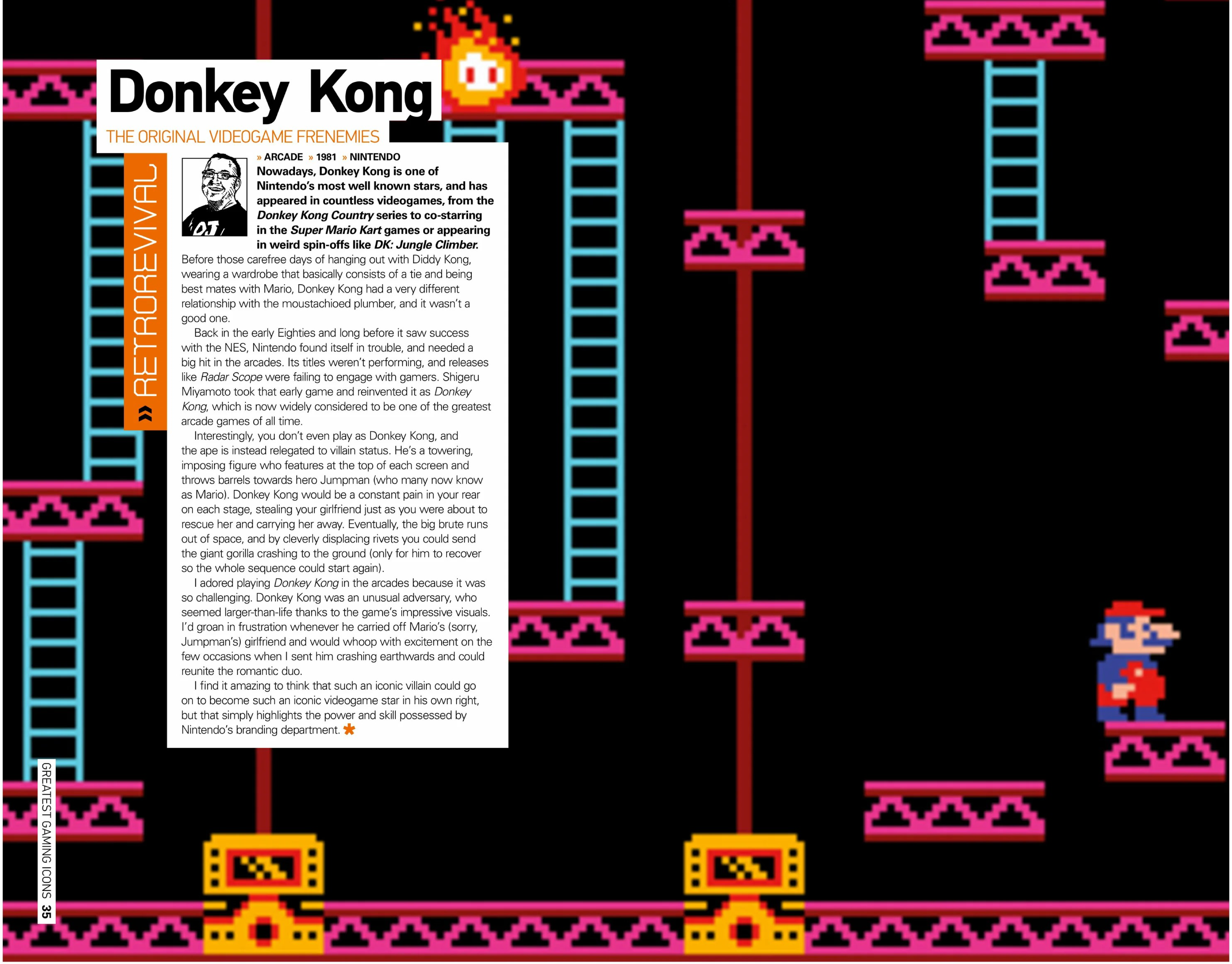
HELP!

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** DONKEY KONG
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** THROWING BARRELS



Donkey Kong

THE ORIGINAL VIDEOGAME FRENEMIES

» ARCADE » 1981 » NINTENDO

Nowadays, Donkey Kong is one of Nintendo's most well known stars, and has appeared in countless videogames, from the *Donkey Kong Country* series to co-starring in the *Super Mario Kart* games or appearing in weird spin-offs like *DK: Jungle Climber*. Before those carefree days of hanging out with Diddy Kong, wearing a wardrobe that basically consists of a tie and being best mates with Mario, Donkey Kong had a very different relationship with the moustachioed plumber, and it wasn't a good one.

Back in the early Eighties and long before it saw success with the NES, Nintendo found itself in trouble, and needed a big hit in the arcades. Its titles weren't performing, and releases like *Radar Scope* were failing to engage with gamers. Shigeru Miyamoto took that early game and reinvented it as *Donkey Kong*, which is now widely considered to be one of the greatest arcade games of all time.

Interestingly, you don't even play as Donkey Kong, and the ape is instead relegated to villain status. He's a towering, imposing figure who features at the top of each screen and throws barrels towards hero Jumpman (who many now know as Mario). Donkey Kong would be a constant pain in your rear on each stage, stealing your girlfriend just as you were about to rescue her and carrying her away. Eventually, the big brute runs out of space, and by cleverly displacing rivets you could send the giant gorilla crashing to the ground (only for him to recover so the whole sequence could start again).

I adored playing *Donkey Kong* in the arcades because it was so challenging. Donkey Kong was an unusual adversary, who seemed larger-than-life thanks to the game's impressive visuals. I'd groan in frustration whenever he carried off Mario's (sorry, Jumpman's) girlfriend and would whoop with excitement on the few occasions when I sent him crashing earthwards and could reunite the romantic duo.

I find it amazing to think that such an iconic villain could go on to become such an iconic videogame star in his own right, but that simply highlights the power and skill possessed by Nintendo's branding department. ✱

MARIO

Is there any videogame character more recognised that Nintendo's Italian plumber? Discover what made Mario so successful

ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** MARIO
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** DONKEY KONG
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
- **» FINEST HOUR:** SUPER MARIO WORLD
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** RESCUING PRINCESSES

Success stories were rare when *Super Mario Bros* hit the Famicom in 1985. We don't need to explain the intricacies of the videogame crash from which the NES emerged, but suffice to say that prior to Nintendo joining the scene things were not good. Mario's first platform outing is often regarded as the game that led to the turn-around of the entire industry, and yet it didn't exactly follow the 'classic game' formula. Unlike trendsetters such as *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*, *Super Mario Bros* was not a pick-up-and-play game in the traditional sense. It wasn't all about getting top scores, it was a test of will and determination that demanded commitment, and yet players kept coming back.

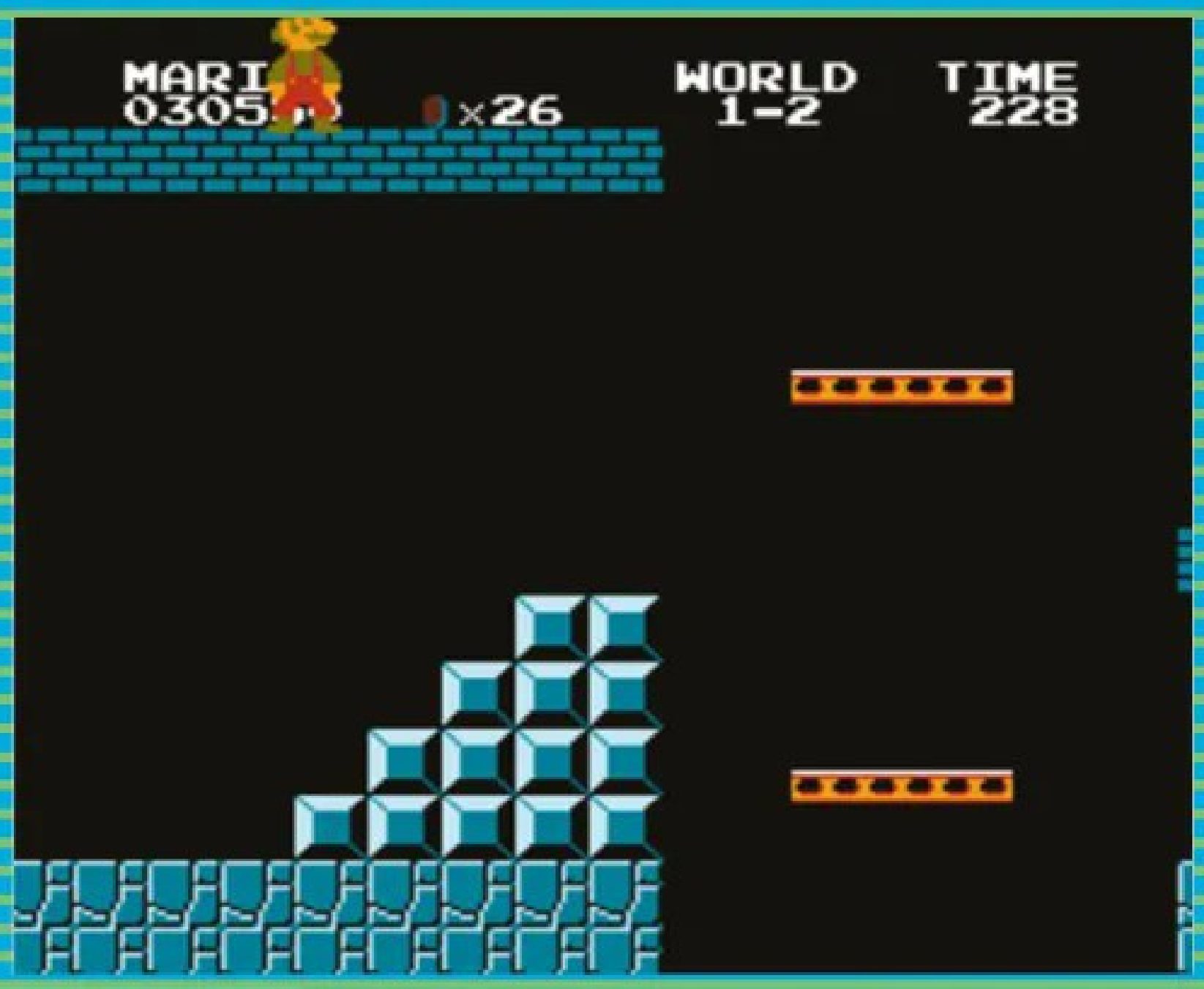
Super Mario Bros 2 is often referred to as the 'black sheep' of the family, but this is a little misguided when you look at the series as a whole. While rumours circulated that *Doki Doki Panic* was remade as a Mario game because the 'true' sequel was deemed too hard for Westerners, there's no denying the impact this game had on the rest of the series, or how much it was in keeping with the spirit of the original game in terms of concept and design philosophy. *Super Mario Bros 2* brought us such superb characters as Shy Guy and Bob-Ombs, it established the ever-lovable Toad as a regular character and also introduced the gaming world to what we believe is its first transvestite character, World 1-1 boss Birdo (it's all explained in the game manual if you don't believe us). The Japanese sequel introduced virtually nothing new, except for some added difficulty, but in keeping with what would become the tradition of the series – and a trademark of Miyamoto's work – *Super Mario Bros 2* is teeming with creativity and 'out there' thinking (you can't even jump on the enemy's head to kill it). In this respect it was everything a *Super Mario Bros* sequel should have been – hardly the oddball cousin it is made out to be.

It was *Super Mario Bros 3* that would establish the series as a cultural phenomenon, however. Once again, the series was pushed in new and exciting directions. However, it shows off most of its newest features right from the start in a comfortably familiar setting. The introduction of flight was revolutionary and rather than saving it for later in the game, Nintendo stuck it right up front where everyone could find it in the opening ten seconds. It was also the first *Mario* title to use a map screen (which would essentially become playable in the later, three-dimensional years of the rotund plumber), mini-games (now an established staple of the series and platformers everywhere), and actual costumes in the form of the Frog and Tanooki suits. By the time Nintendo stepped into the 16-bit arena, the formula was well established but it now had issues with being both late to the market and up against new-found competition in the form of an abnormally fast spiky animal. *Super Mario World*'s success was a slow burn but it's no surprise that despite being a launch title it was the most successful title on SNES.

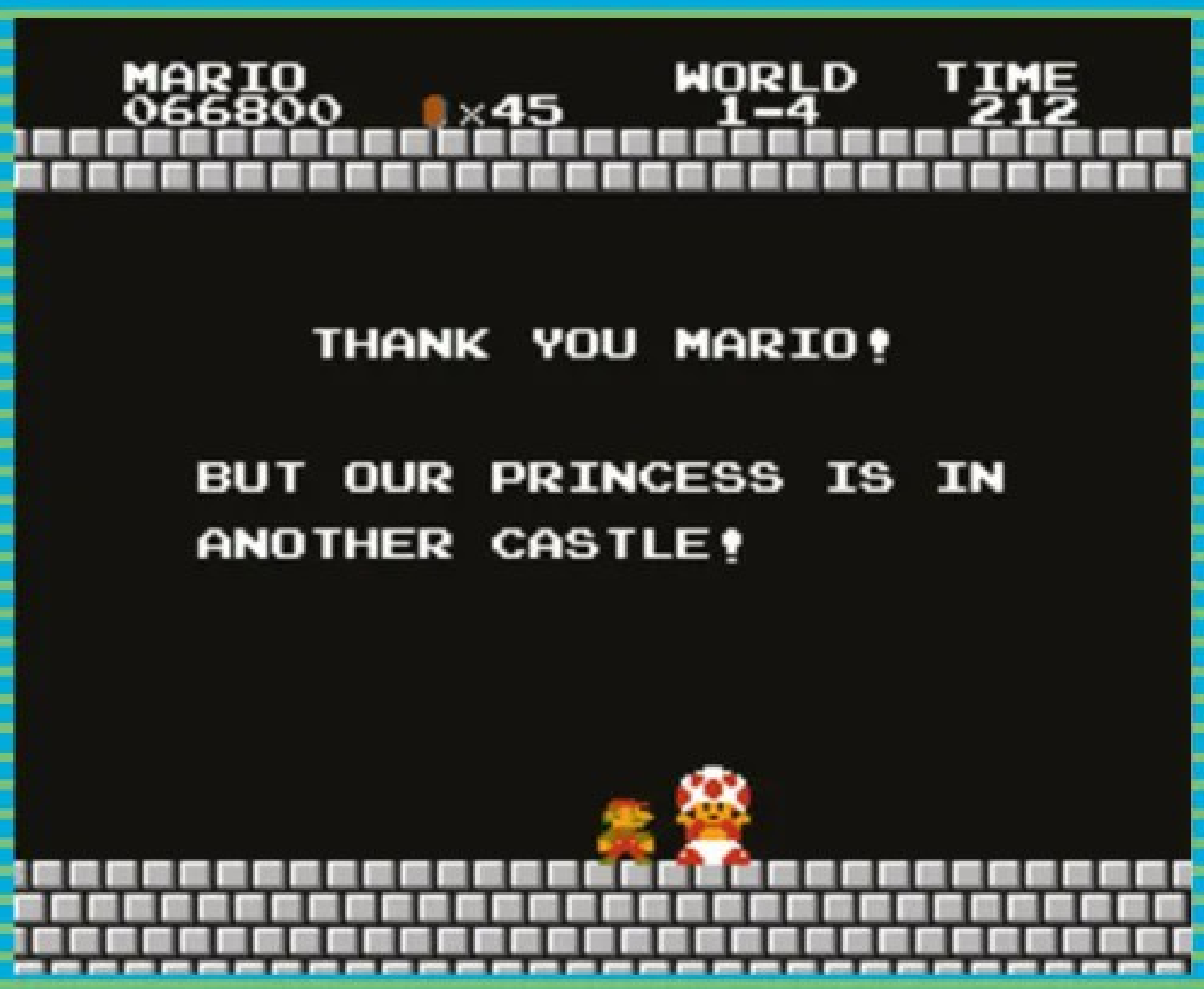
No matter whose side you may have taken during the great battle between plumber and hedgehog, it's difficult to ignore the fact that it remained the *Super Mario* design that lead the way for platform titles for years to come. Sure, *Super Mario* was slow and may even have felt a little clumsy at times, but its design was rarely short of perfection and never failed to surprise and amaze. The introduction of Yoshi as well as a scaling down of power-ups in *SMW* compared to *SMB3* created a positive balance that endures as well as any of the other Mario games (if not better). By the time Mario returned to the Game Boy, sporting bunny ears in *Super Mario Land 2*, we couldn't really be shocked or surprised any more. In many respects the gimmicks were running out, but we wouldn't want to leave you with the impression that *Super Mario* was just about the tricks and costume changes. Certainly, they played a part in terms of offering gameplay variations and diverting attention, but the core of what made all these games great was evident from the start: an invitation to explore and experiment with no shortage of reward. Discovery was at the heart of *Super Mario*'s brilliance and longevity, which, thankfully, hasn't yet been diminished. And what seemed like madness back in 1985 now makes perfect sense. ✱

> **"It remained the Super Mario design that led the way for platform titles"**

> MAGIC MOMENTS



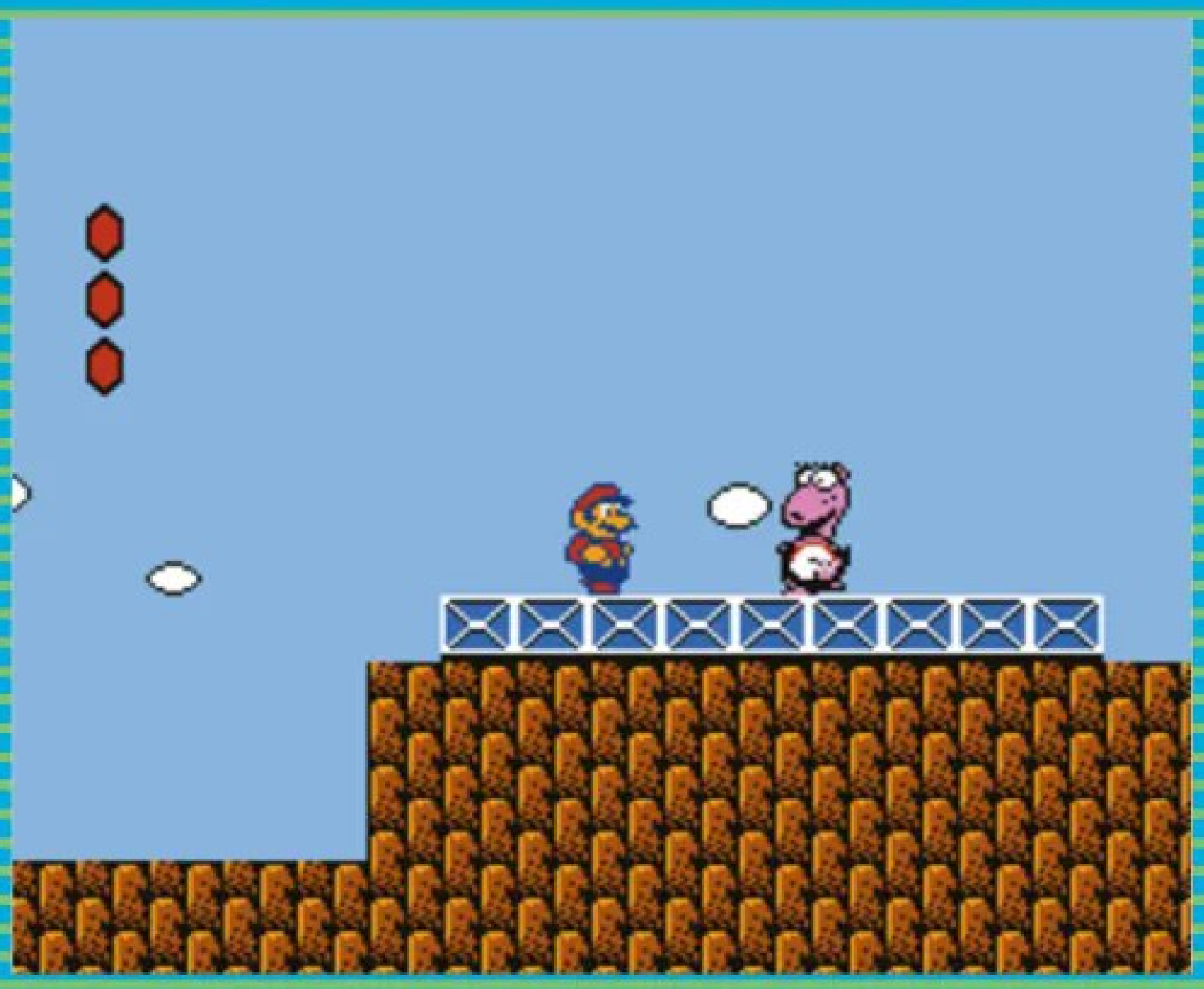
■ Remember the first time you realised you could do this? Videogames haven't been the same since.



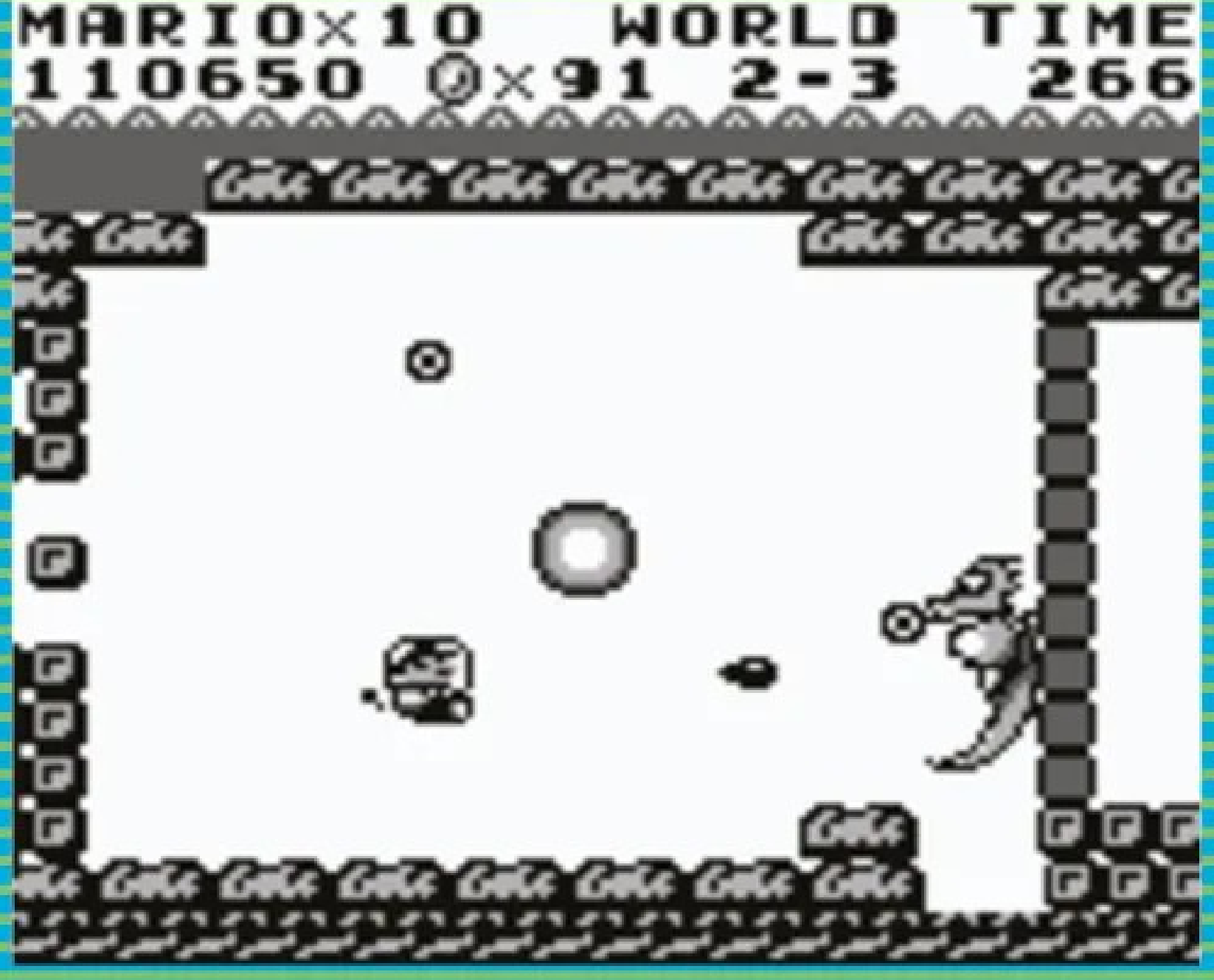
THANK YOU MARIO!

BUT OUR PRINCESS IS IN ANOTHER CASTLE!

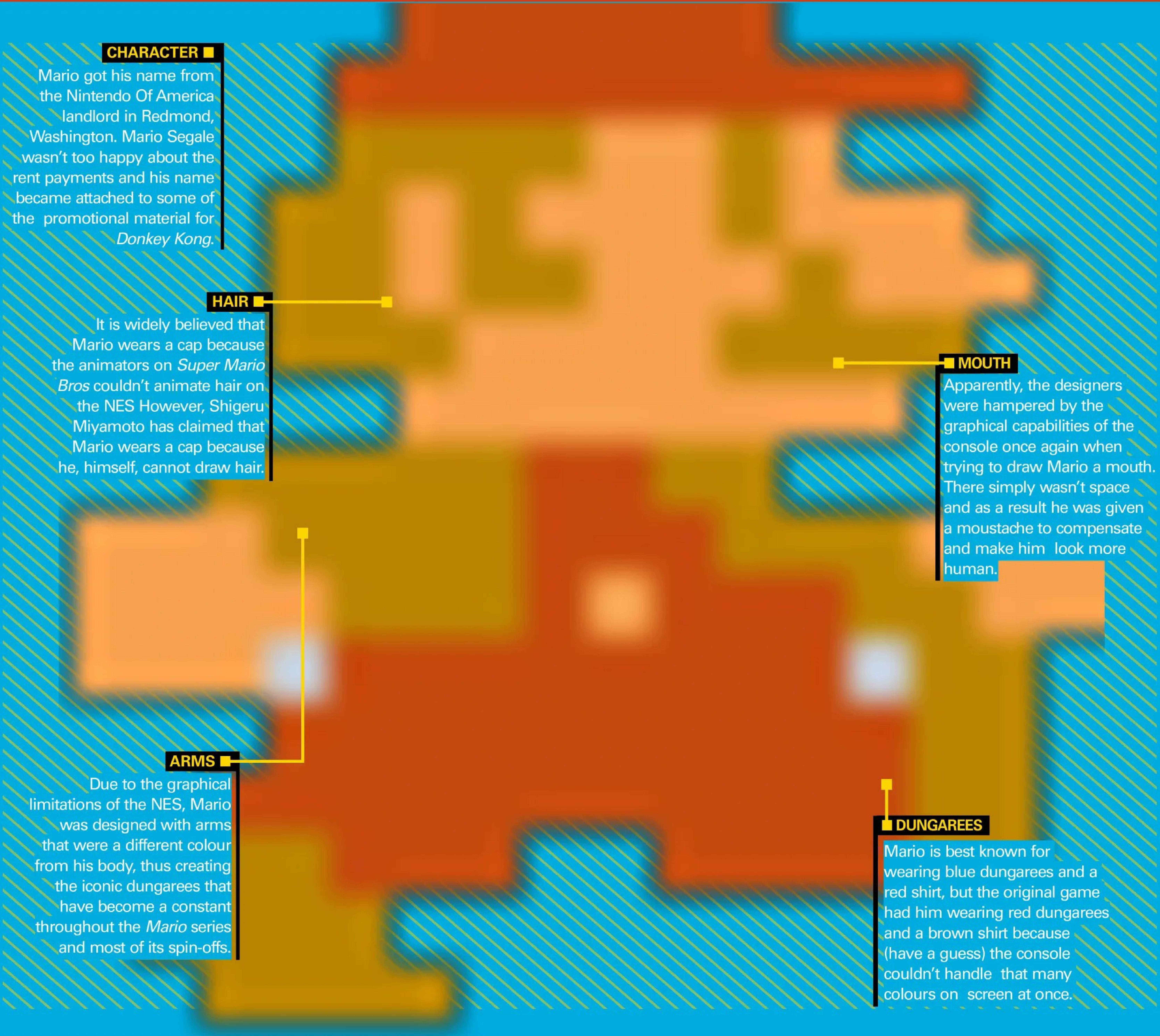
■ One of the greatest lines in videogame history: "Our Princess is in another castle."



■ May we introduce Birdo. The first transvestite character in videogames enters stage right.



■ *Super Mario* turns into a shooter, which was amazing if rather peculiar given the series history.



CHARACTER

Mario got his name from the Nintendo Of America landlord in Redmond, Washington. Mario Segale wasn't too happy about the rent payments and his name became attached to some of the promotional material for *Donkey Kong.*

HAIR

It is widely believed that Mario wears a cap because the animators on *Super Mario Bros* couldn't animate hair on the NES However, Shigeru Miyamoto has claimed that Mario wears a cap because he, himself, cannot draw hair.

MOUTH

Apparently, the designers were hampered by the graphical capabilities of the console once again when trying to draw Mario a mouth. There simply wasn't space and as a result he was given a moustache to compensate and make him look more human.

ARMS

Due to the graphical limitations of the NES, Mario was designed with arms that were a different colour from his body, thus creating the iconic dungarees that have become a constant throughout the *Mario* series and most of its spin-offs.

DUNGAREES

Mario is best known for wearing blue dungarees and a red shirt, but the original game had him wearing red dungarees and a brown shirt because (have a guess) the console couldn't handle that many colours on screen at once.

Gravity just couldn't keep the rising star of Mario on the groun *Super Mario Bros 3* sets him.

The Koopa gunship is an incredible homage to the Star Destroyer opening of *Star Wars.*

For the first – and thankfully not the last – time, Mario tries on some new clothes to magical effect.

Enter the dragon as Yoshi appears for the first time and steals the hearts of gamers everywhere.

MARIO'S SUPER POWER-UPS

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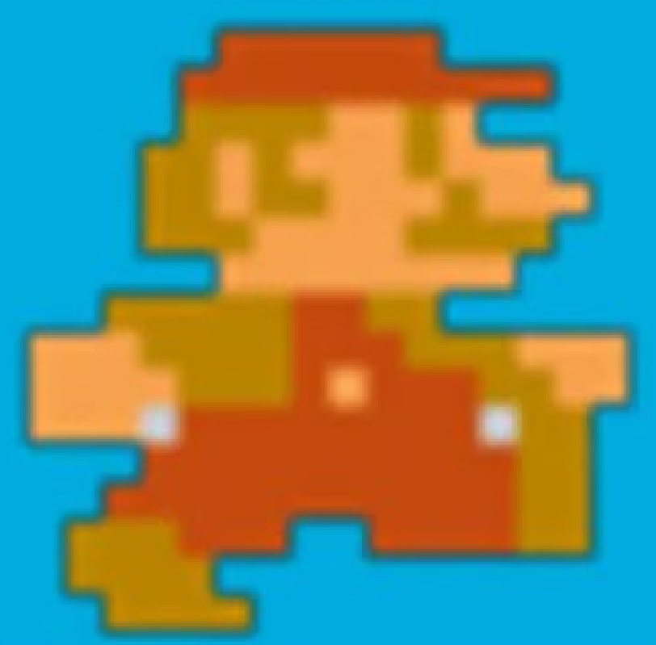

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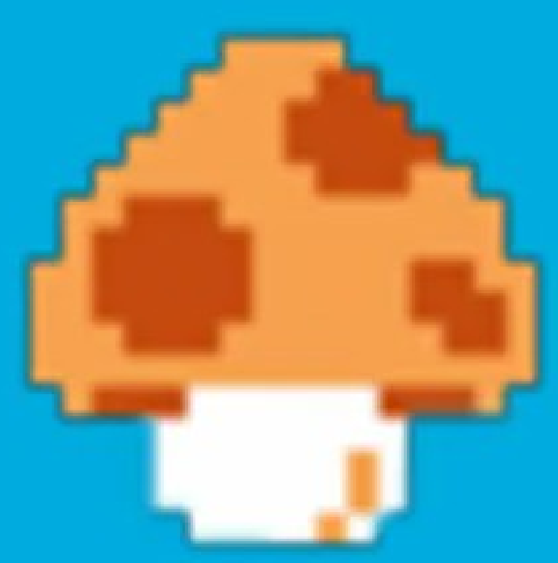

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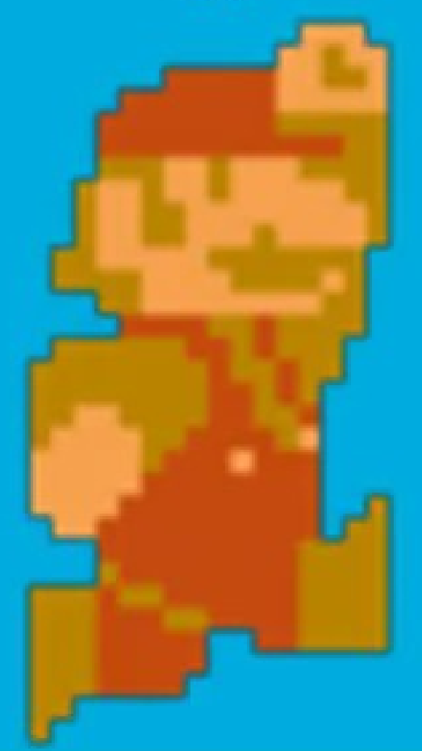

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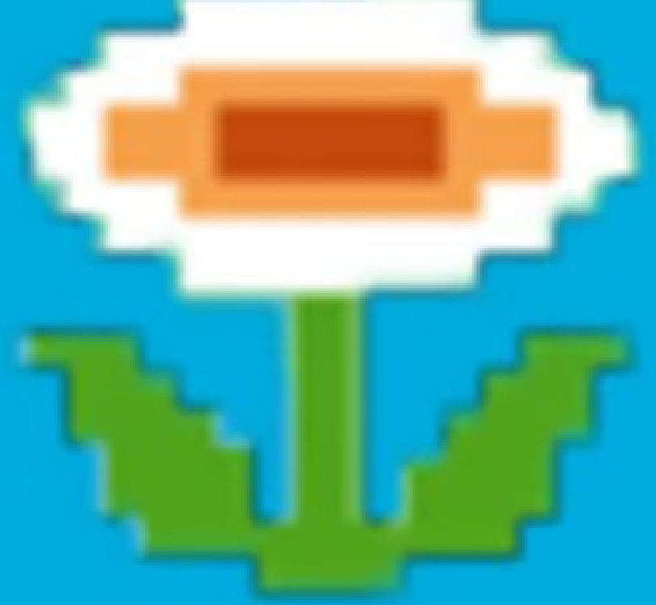

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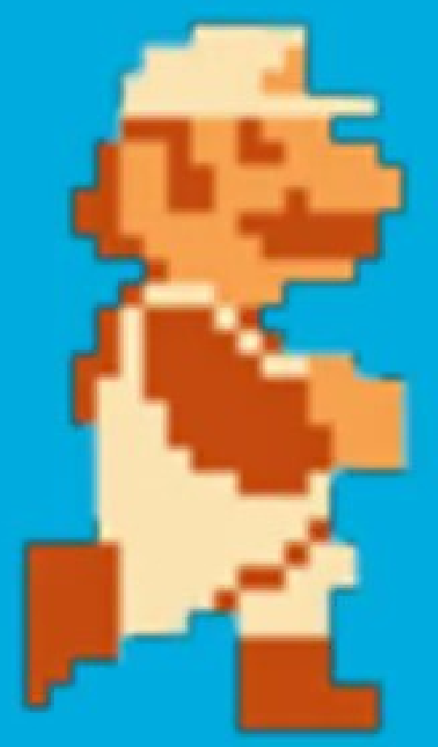

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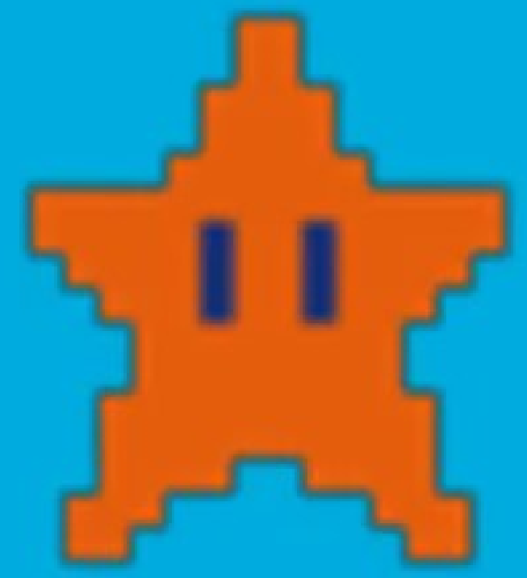

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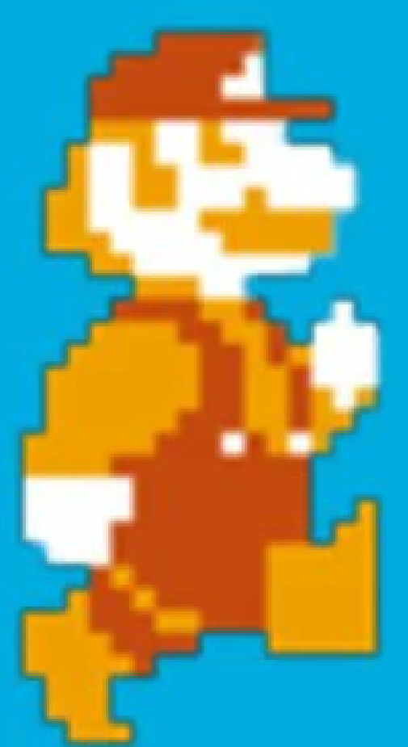

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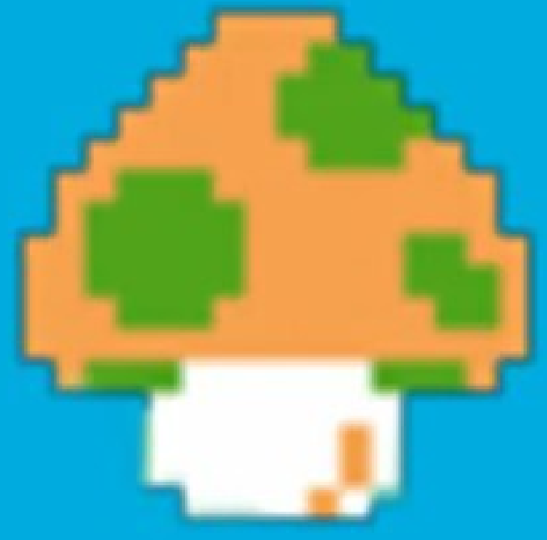

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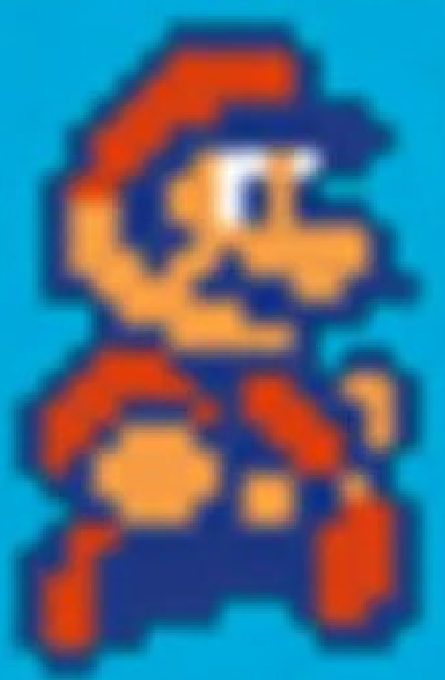

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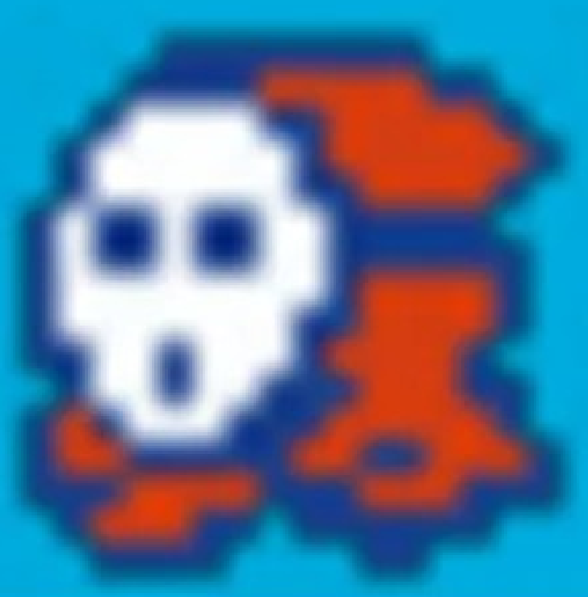

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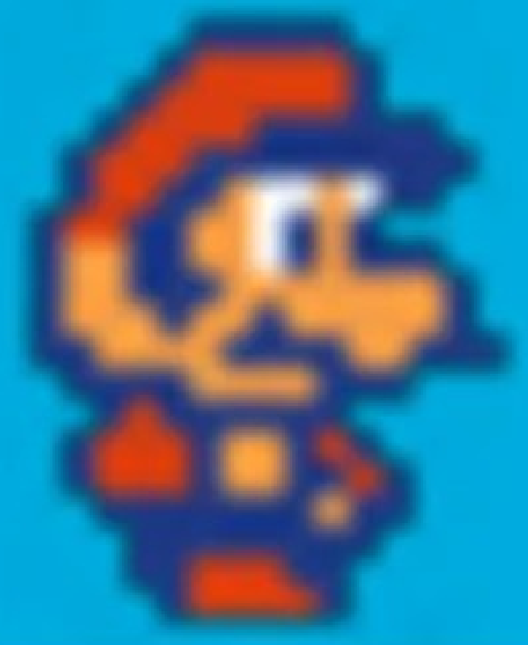

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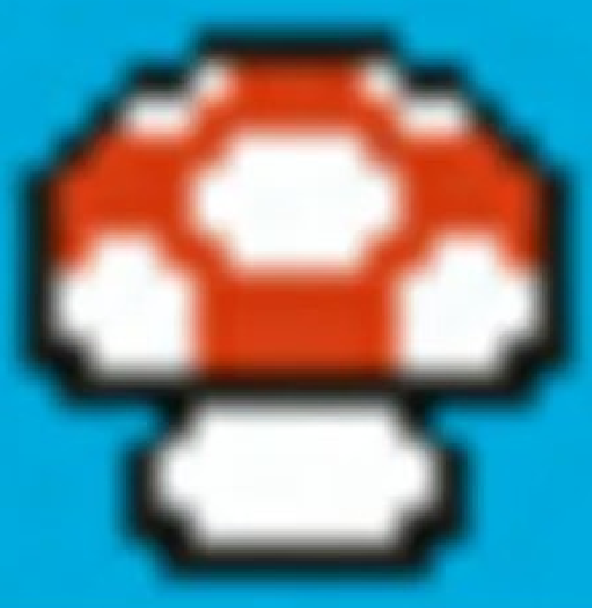

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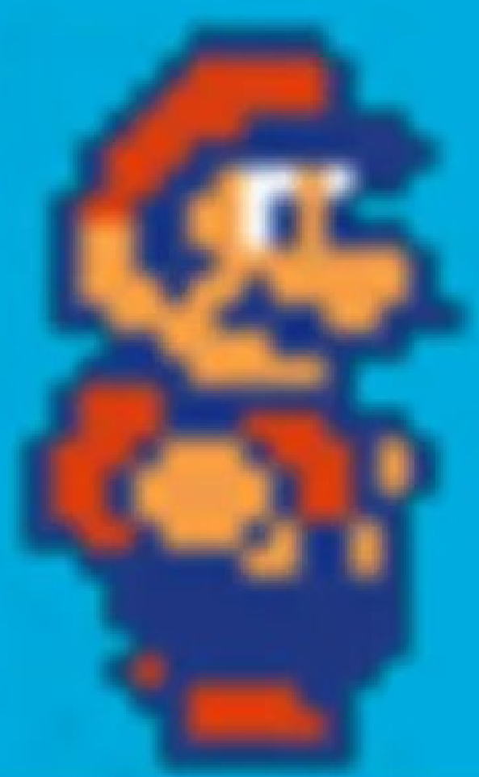

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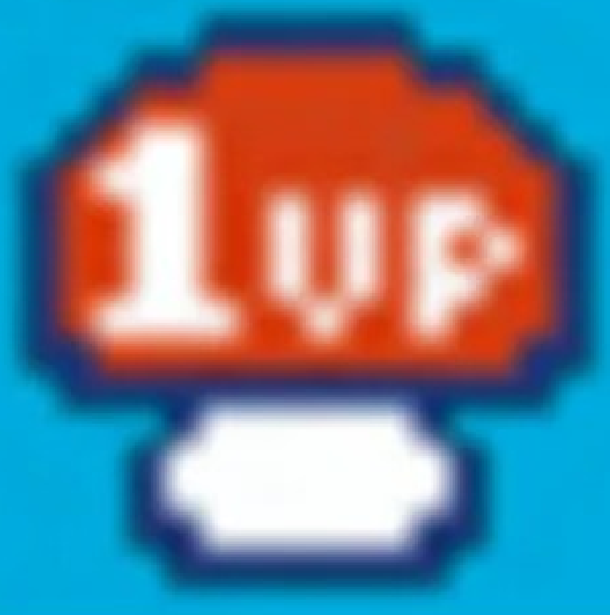

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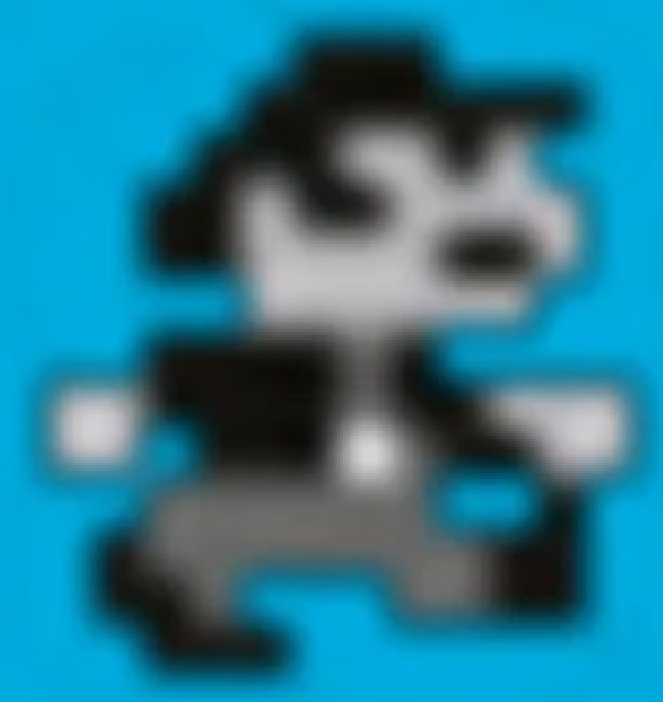

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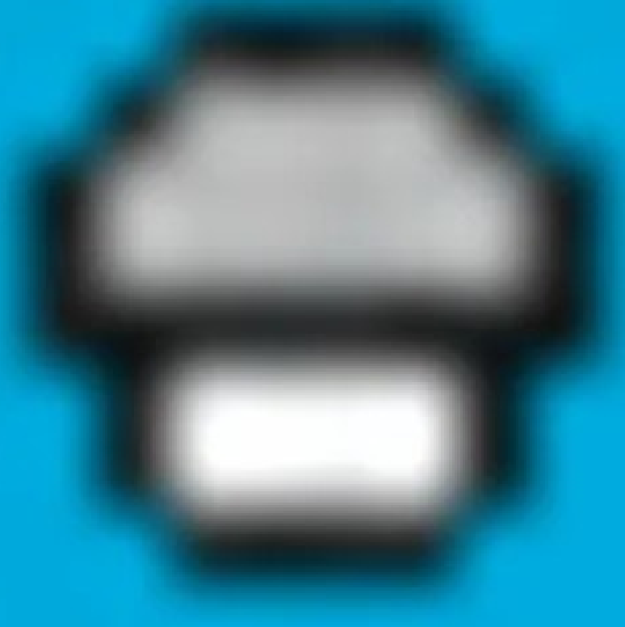

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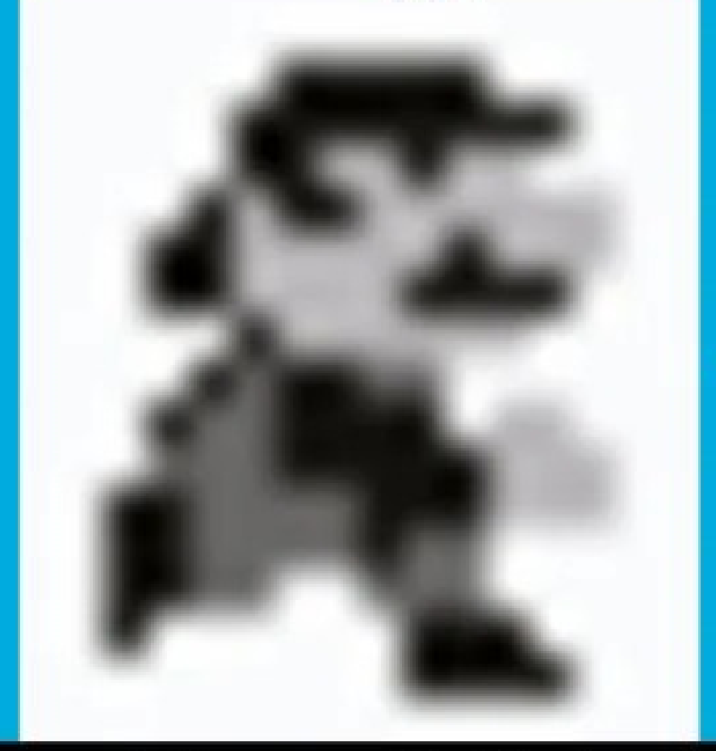

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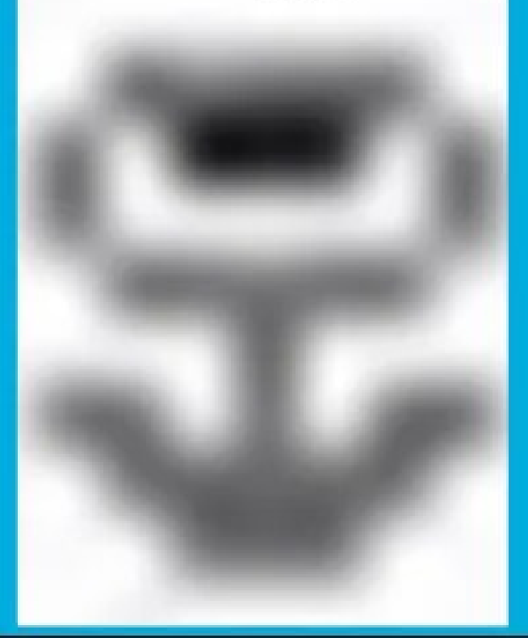

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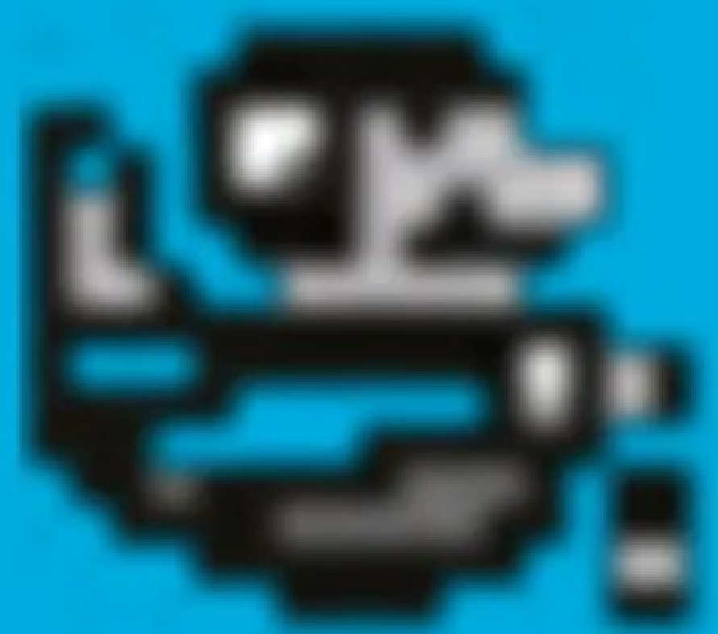

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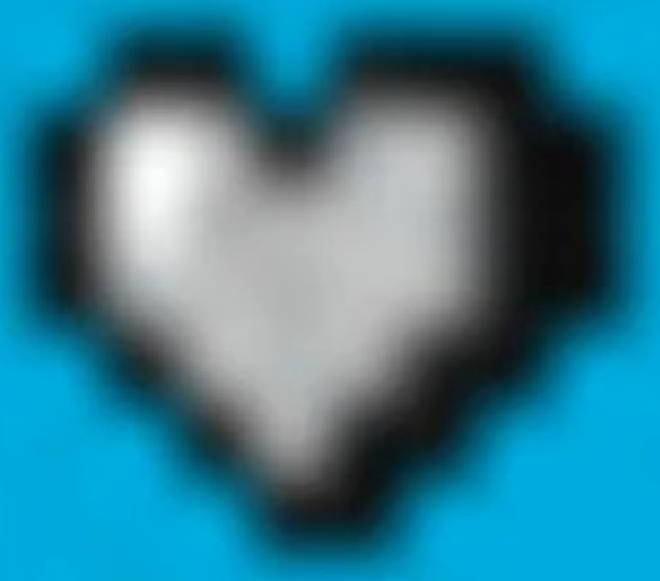

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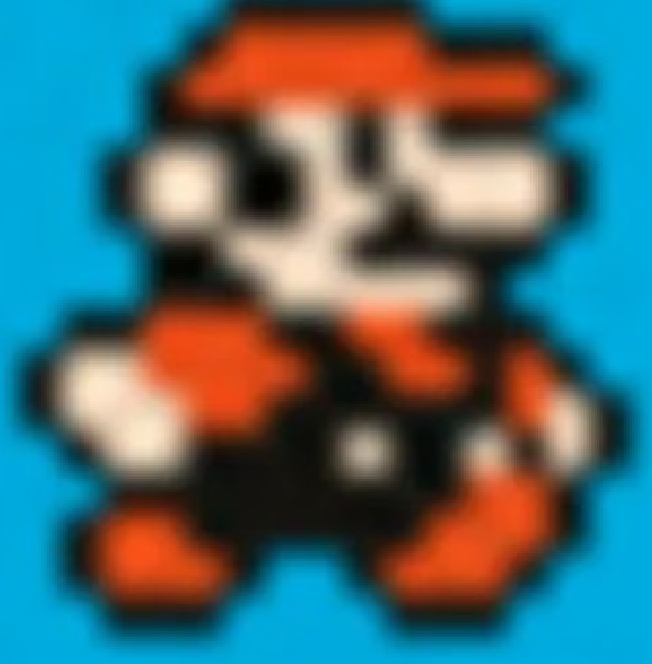

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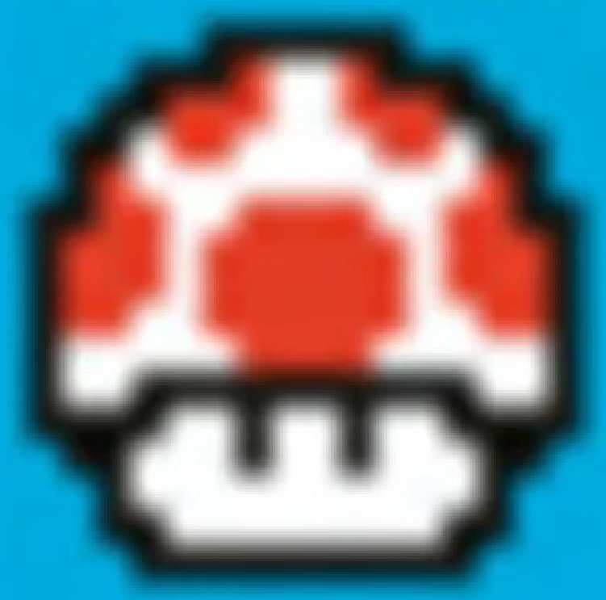

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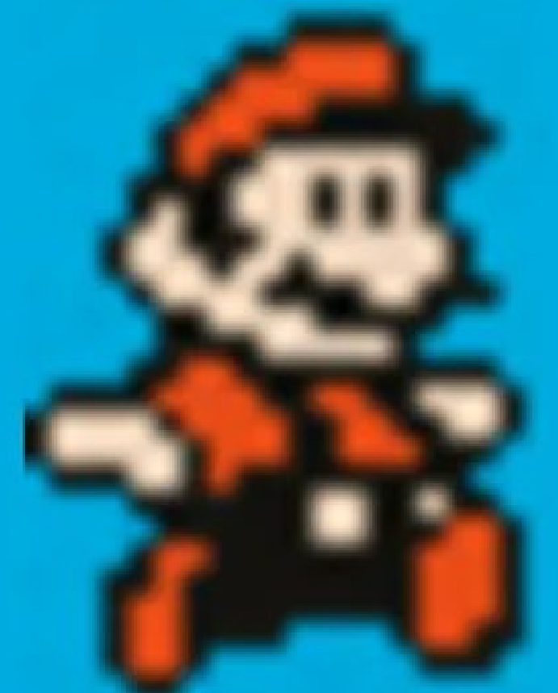

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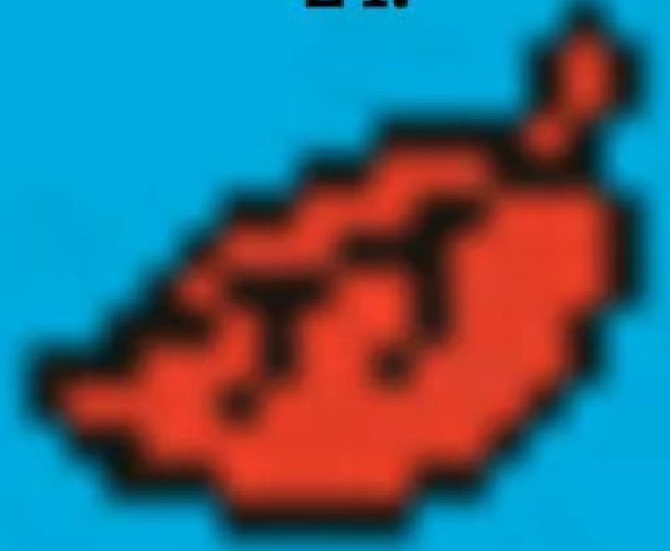

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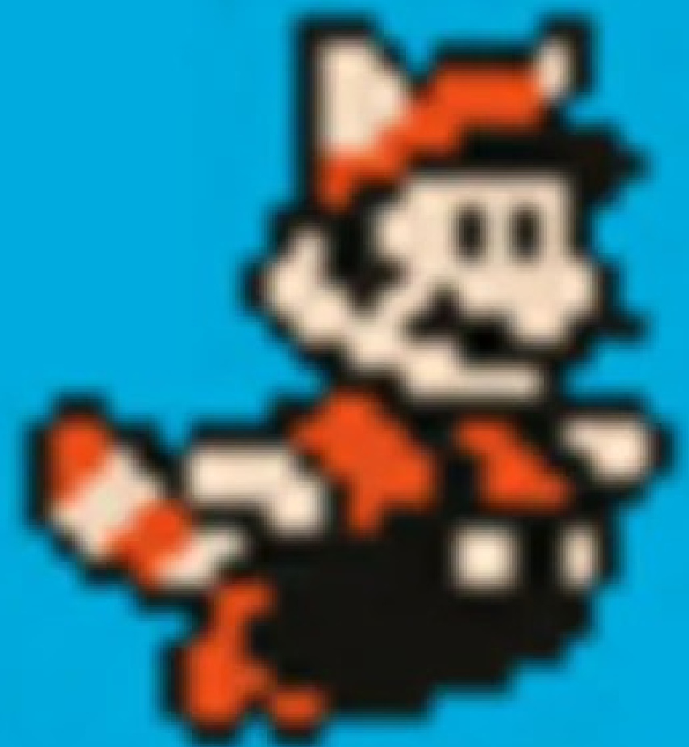

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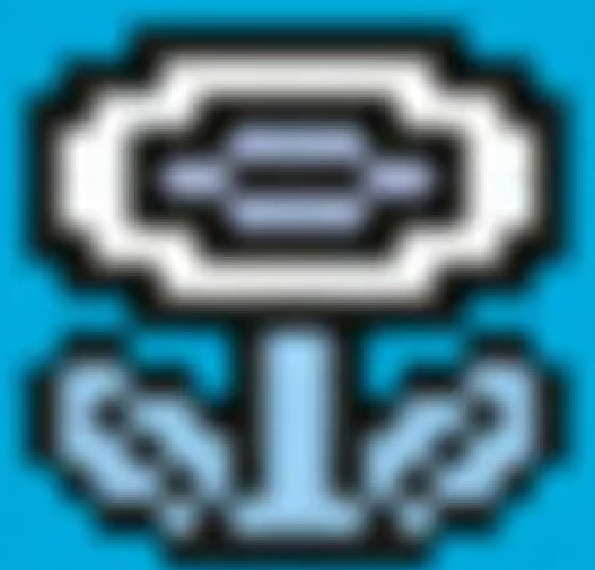

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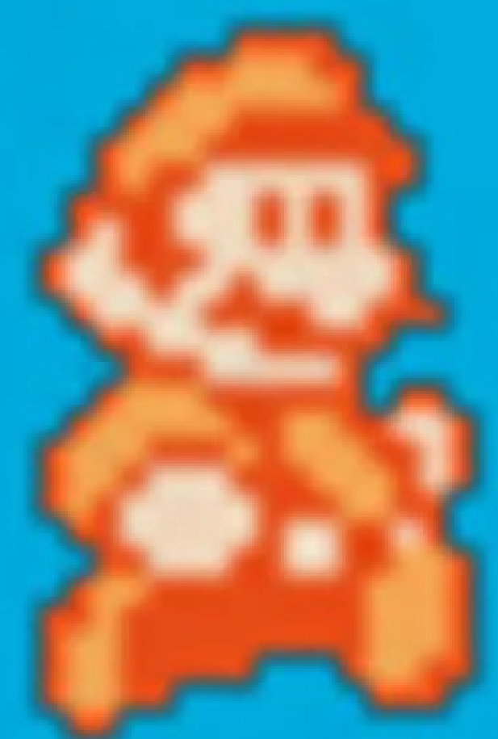

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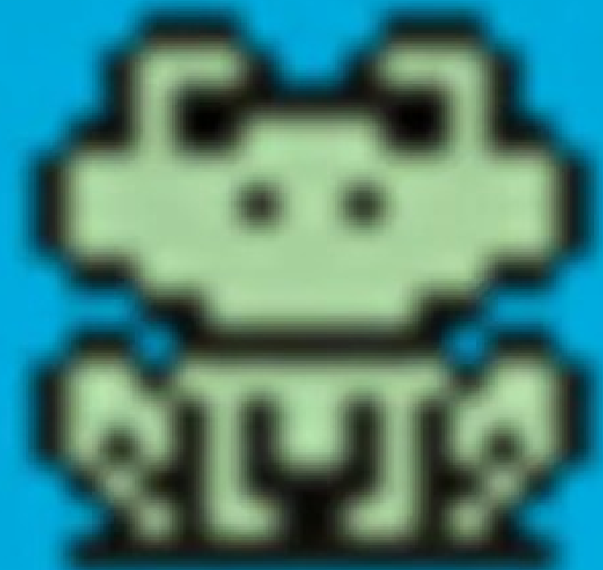

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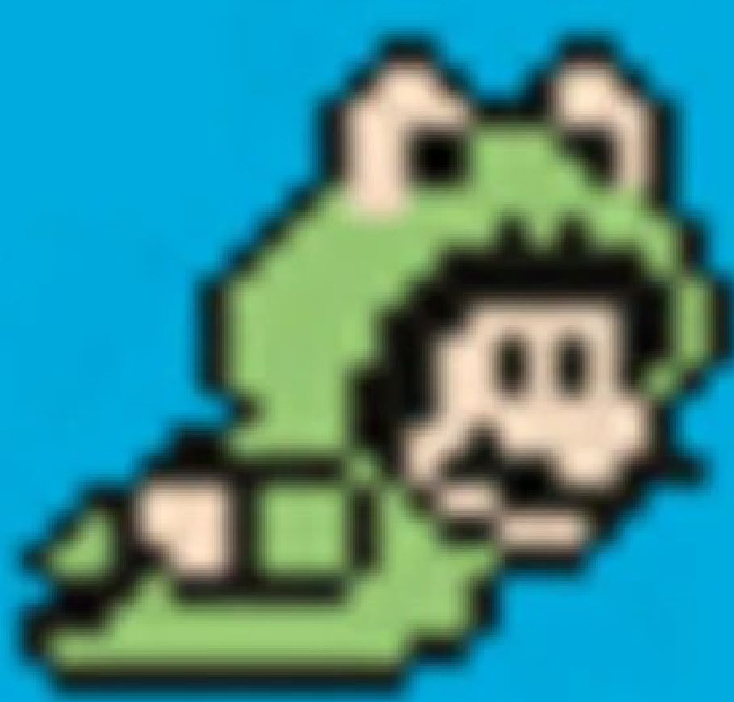

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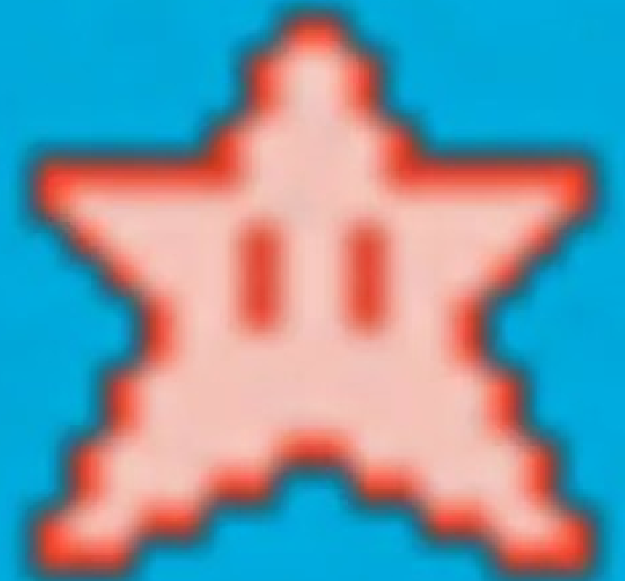

THE PROGRESSION OF Mario's power-ups through the series is one of its strongest features and has helped to keep each game feeling fresh and innovative even when the template behind each title has been very similar. Once again *SMB2* is unique to the series in that it starts off with a Super Mario rather than a small Mario and has a power bar maintained by collecting hearts. In the original game an injury to Mario in any powered state would see him revert to small Mario, but from *SMB3* onwards he has always returned to Super Mario first before becoming small again. This was a concession for Western gamers to make the games slightly easier, while Japanese gamers got the usual, steep decline to mini Mario if they took a hit. Fire Mario remains one of the most popular power-ups in the series, but it was really *SMB3* that had the greatest assortment of

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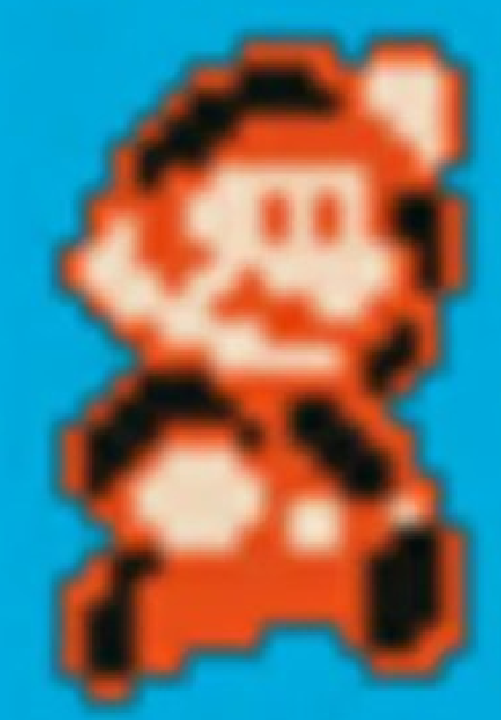
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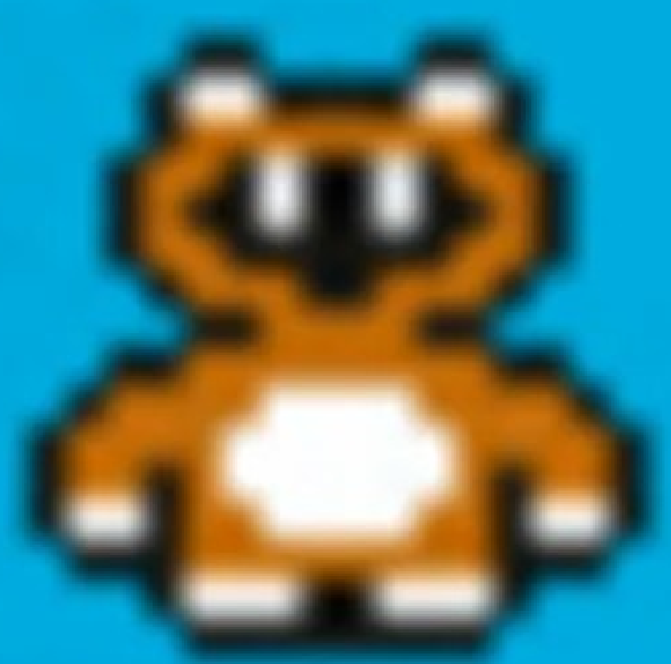
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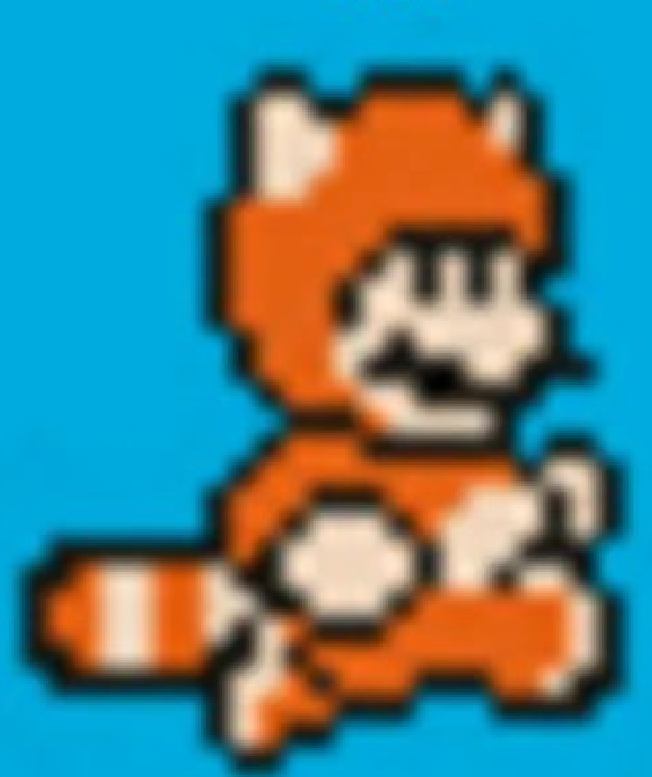
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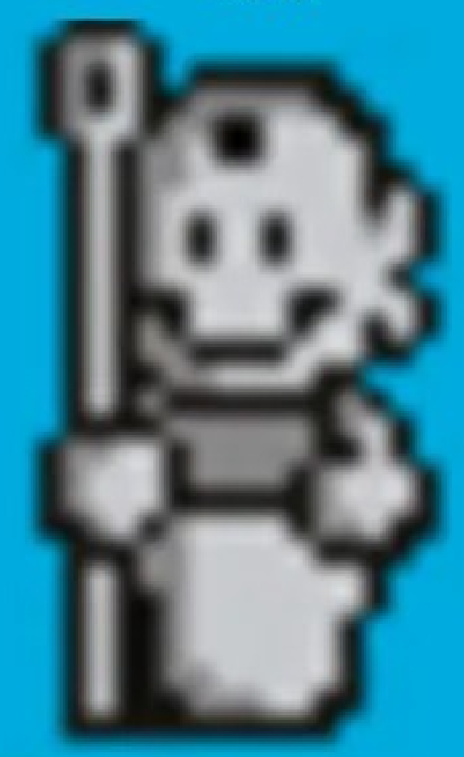
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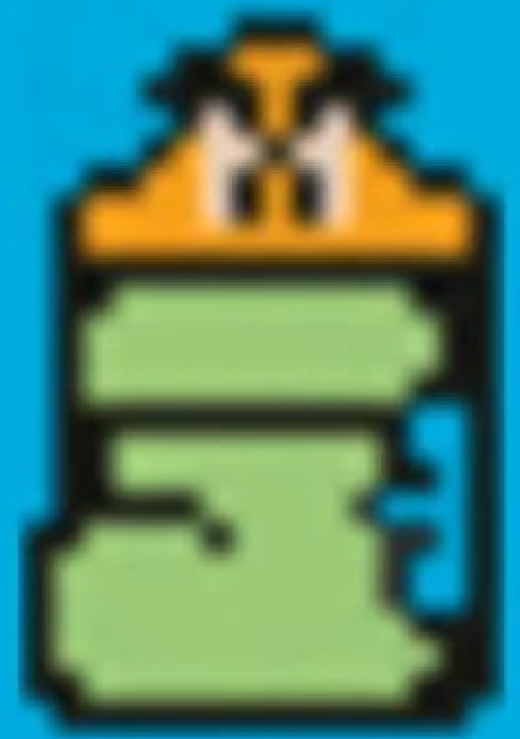
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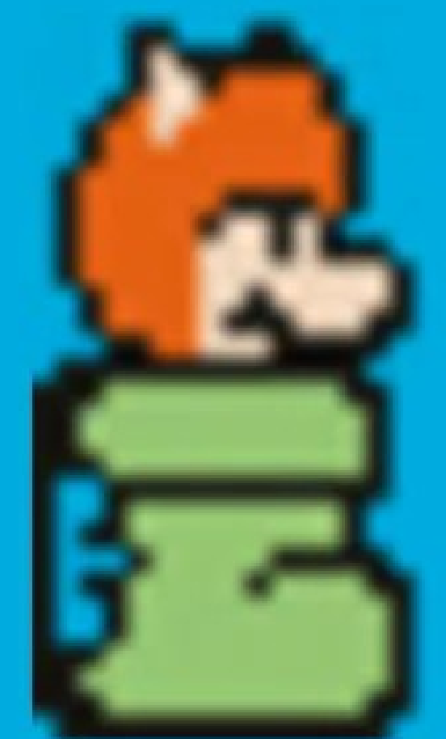
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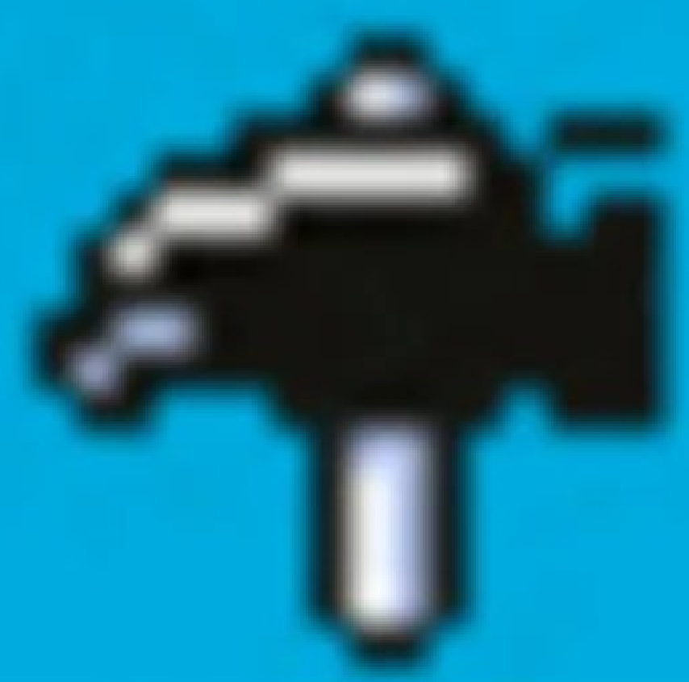
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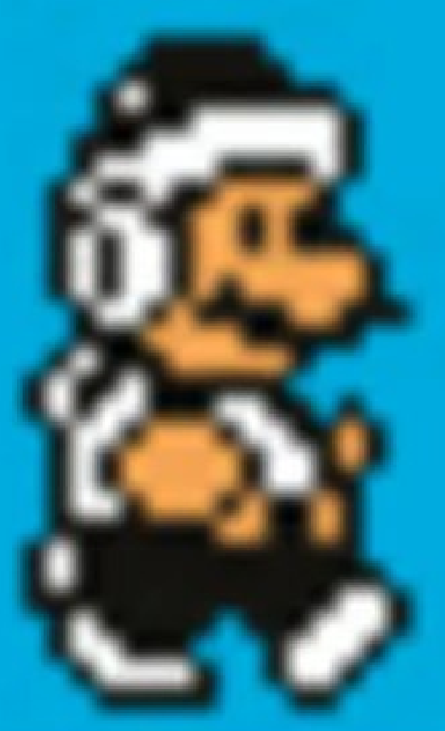
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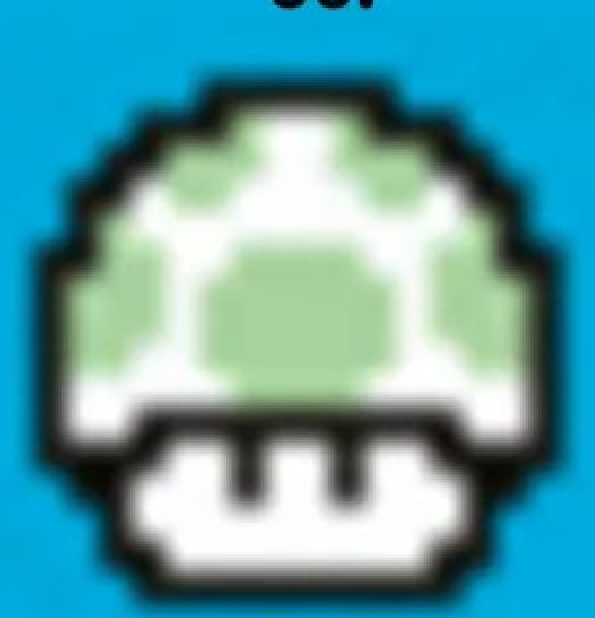
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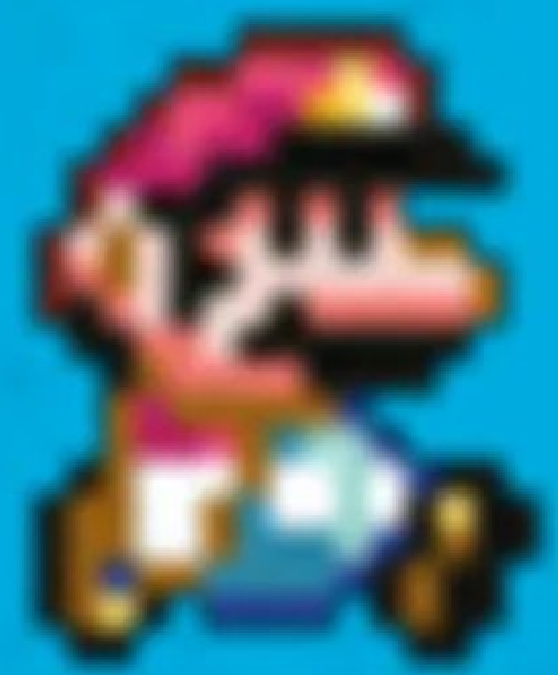
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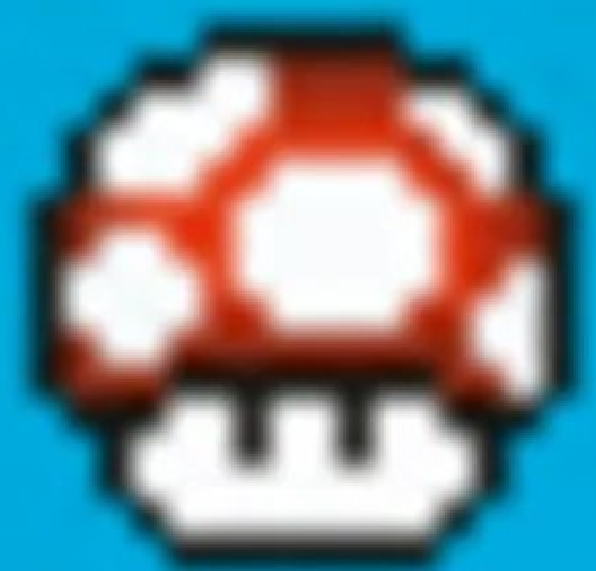
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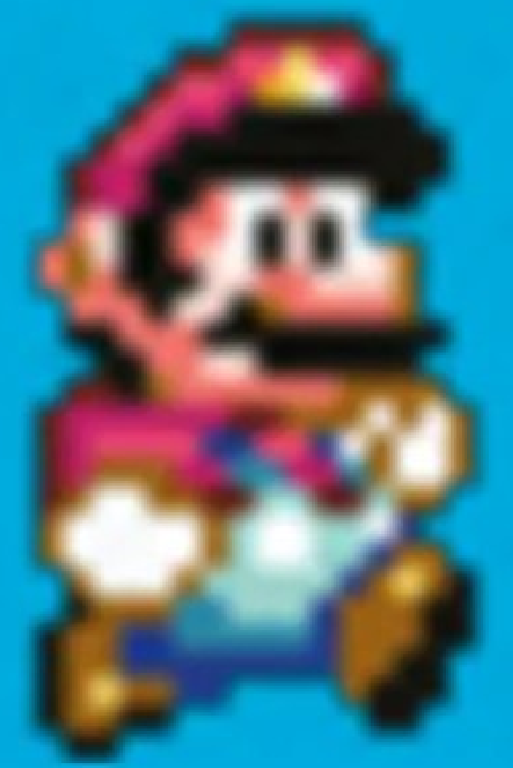
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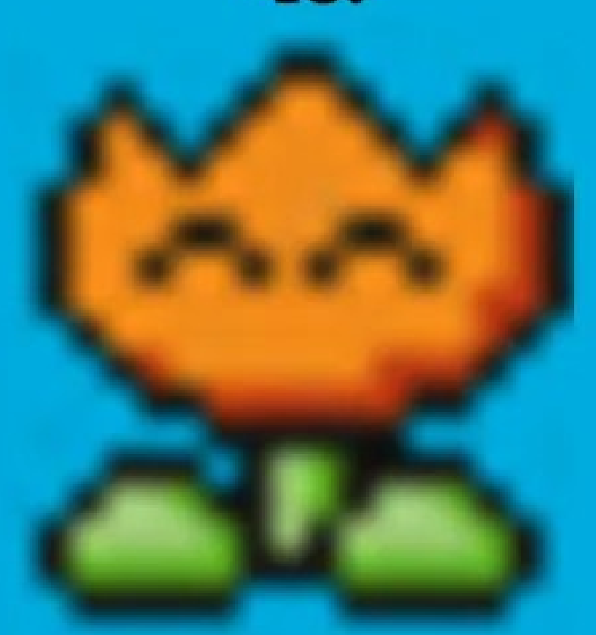
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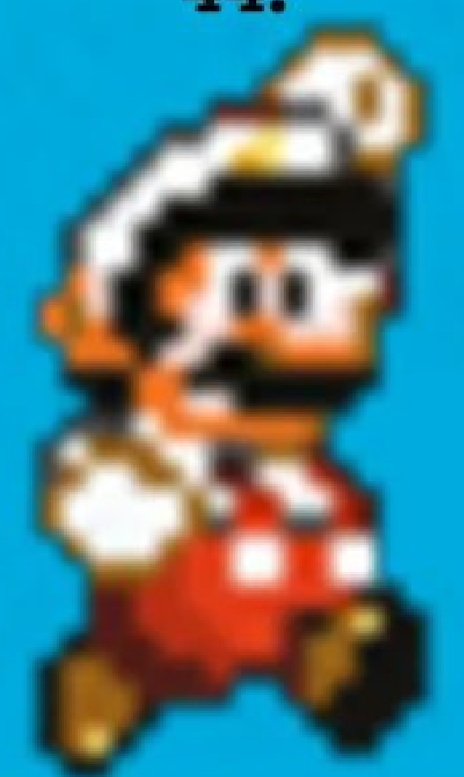
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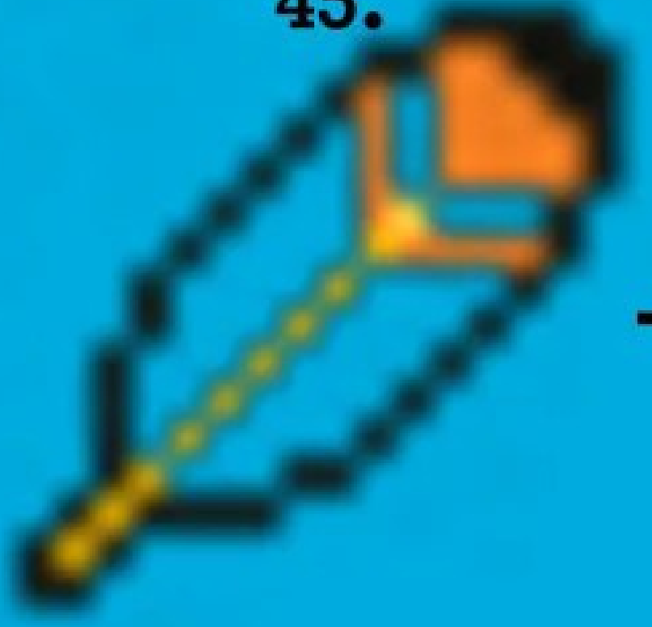
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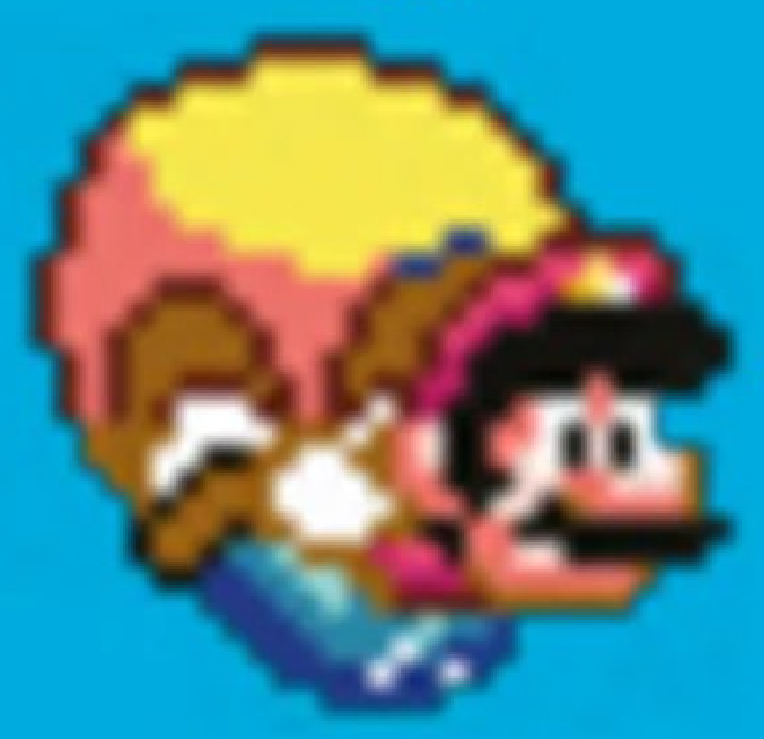
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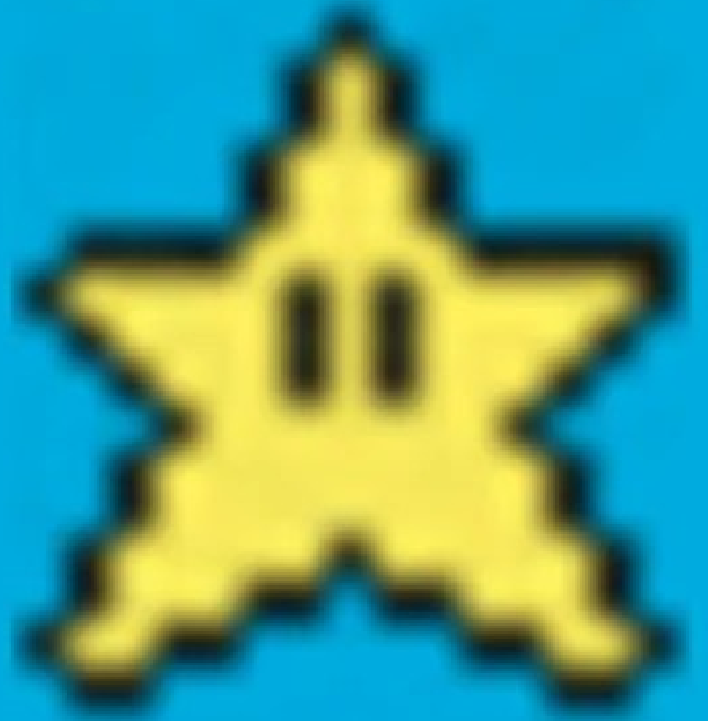
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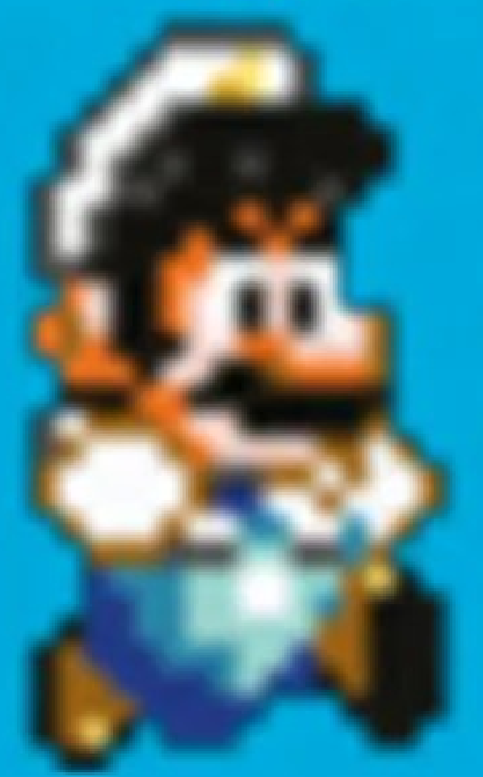
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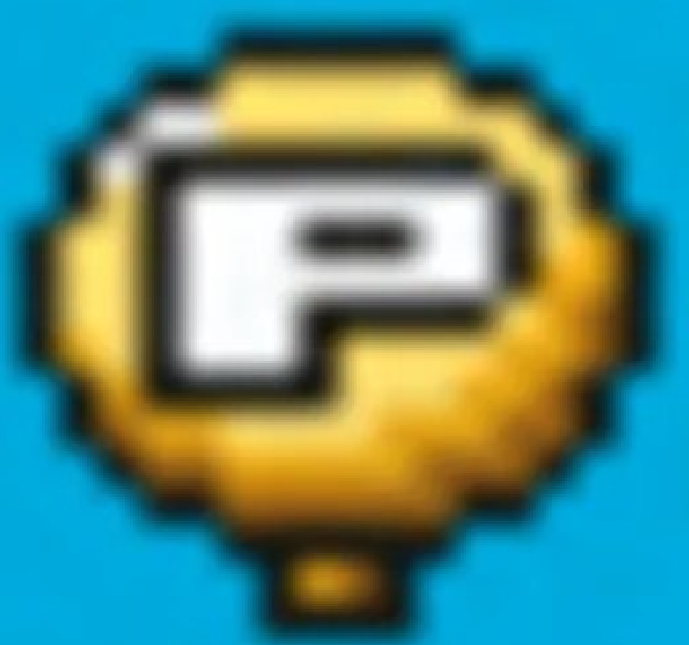
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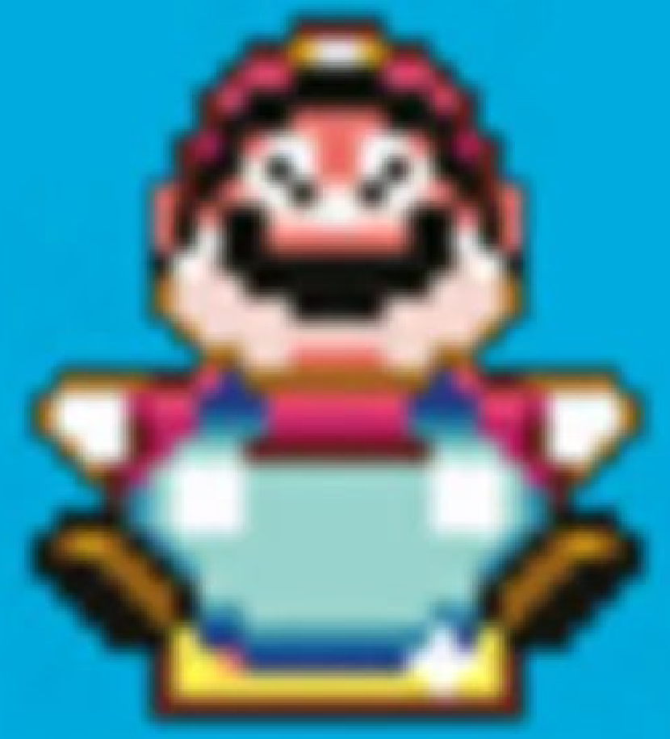
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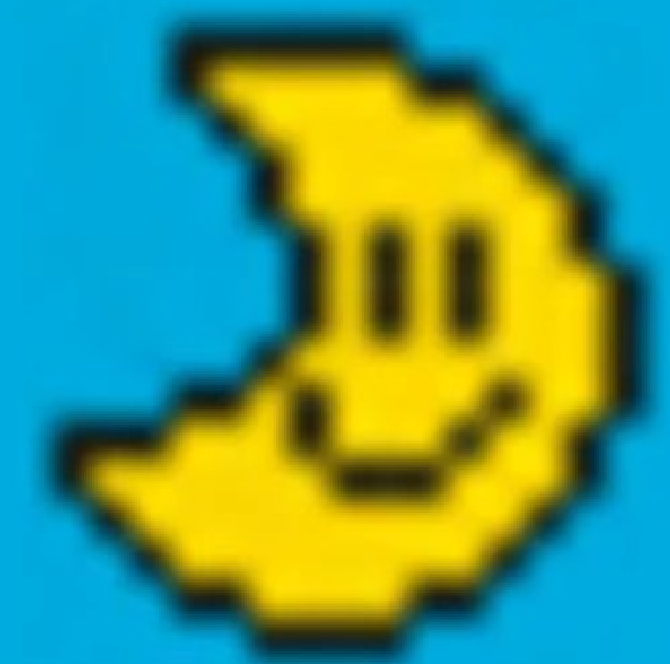
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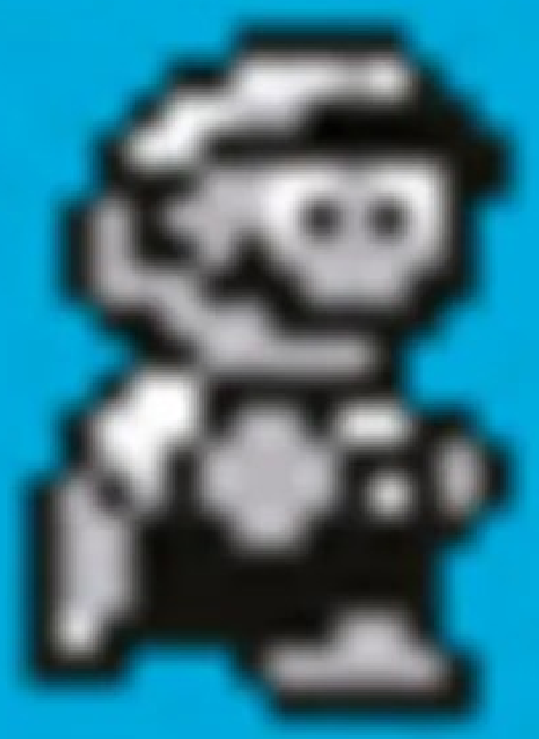
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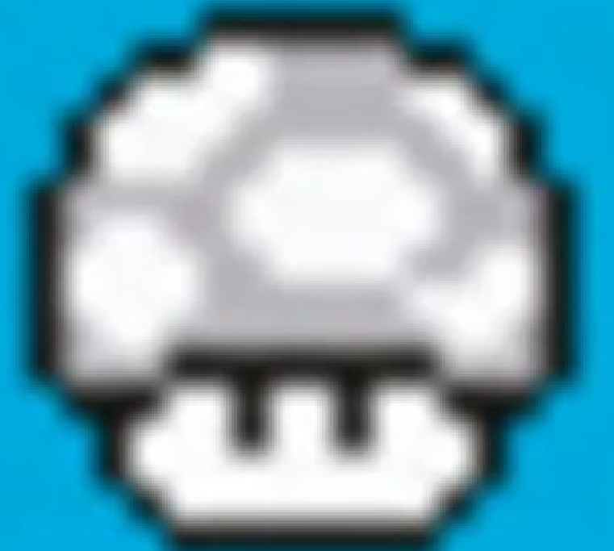
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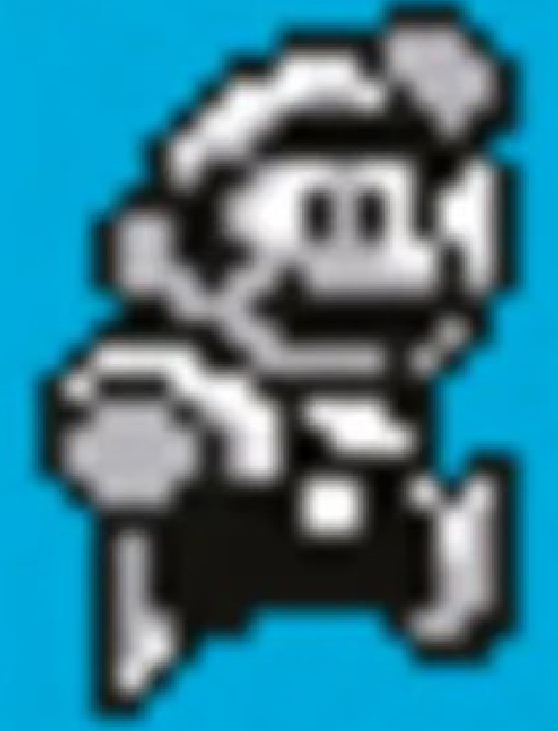
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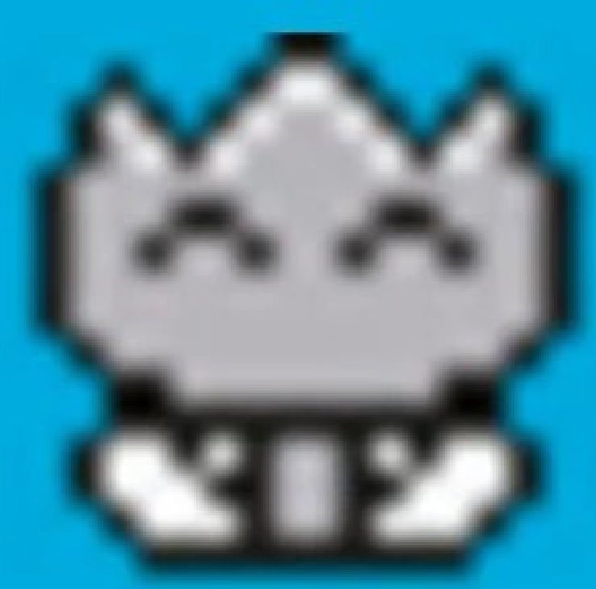
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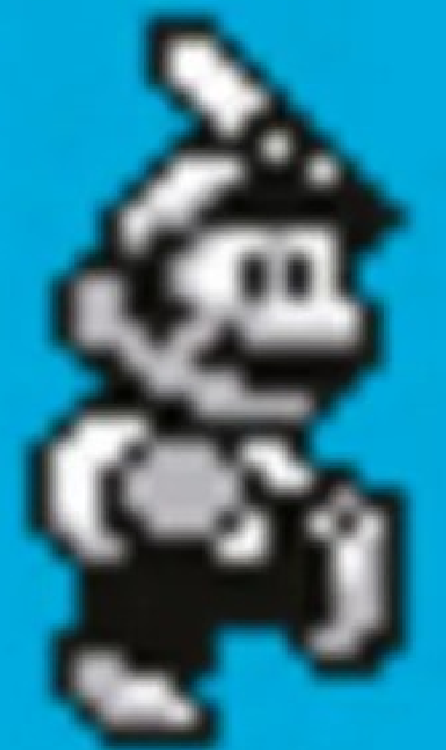
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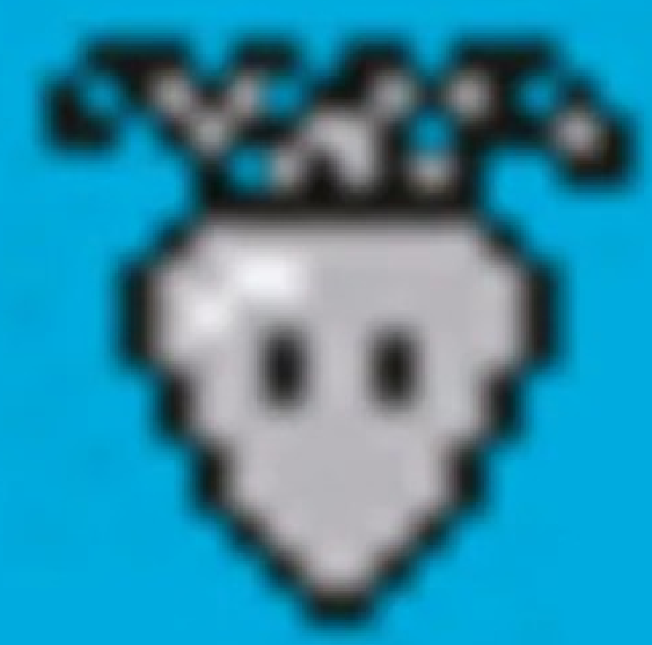
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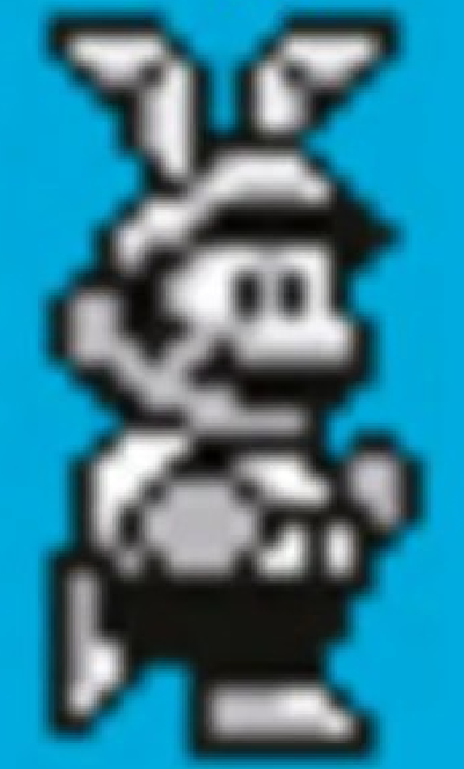
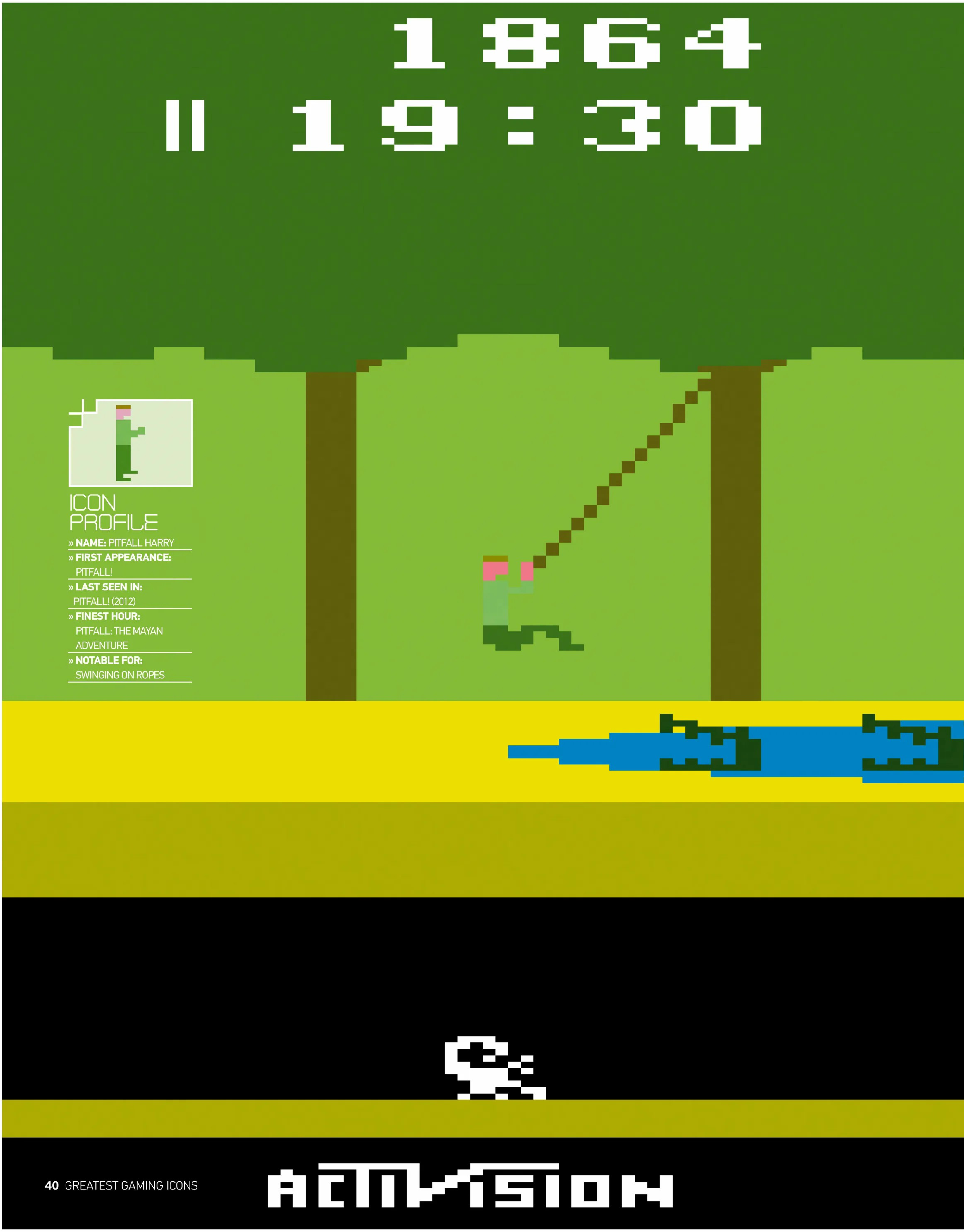


upgrades. As good as *SMW's* cape was, it was the introduction of Yoshi that stole the show and essentially ended the reign of power-ups in Super Mario. *SMB3's* Racoon Leaf and P-Feather remain the strongest flying power-ups in our opinion and we've always had a soft spot for the Frog Suit. The Frog and Tanooki suits were the first and only costumes in the series that completely covered Mario's trademark dungaree attire, but to great effect. The Kuribo Boot is another unique power-up in that it was the only one that you actually stole from another character in the game. It's actually more of a vehicle than a power-up, but it deserves to be recognised among all the others. Later games like *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Super Mario 3D World* have continued adding these special elements to the Mario canon with forms like the Bee Suit and Cat Suit.

1. Mario (*SMB*)
2. Super Mushroom
3. Super Mario
4. Fire Flower
5. Fire Mario
6. Starman
7. Invincible Mario
8. 1-Up Mushroom
9. Mario (*SMB2*)
10. Shy Guy
11. Mini-Mario
12. Super Mushroom (*SMB2*)
13. Super Mario
14. 1-Up Mushroom (*SMB2*)
15. Mario (*SML*)
16. Super Mushroom (*SML*)
17. Super Mario (*SML*)
18. Fire Flower (*SML*)
19. Sky Pop
20. 1-Up Heart
21. Mario (*SMB3*)
22. Super Mushroom (*SMB3*)
23. Super Mario (*SMB3*)
24. Super Leaf
25. Raccoon Mario
26. Fire Flower (*SMB3*)
27. Fire Mario (*SMB3*)
28. Frog Suit
29. Frog Mario
30. Starman (*SMB3*)
31. Invincible
32. Mario (*SMB3*)
32. Tanooki Suit
33. Tanooki Mario
34. Statue Mario
35. Kuribo (Goomba) Shoe
36. Kuribo Mario
37. Hammer Bros Hammer
38. Hammer Mario
39. 1-Up Mushroom (*SMB3*)
40. Mario (*SMW*)
41. Super Mushroom (*SMW*)
42. Super Mario (*SMW*)
43. Fire Flower (*SMW*)
44. Fire Mario (*SMW*)
45. Cape Feather
46. Cape Mario
47. Starman (*SMW*)
48. Invincible Mario (*SMW*)
49. P-Balloon
50. Balloon Mario
51. 3-Up Moon
52. Mario (*SML2*)
53. Super Mushroom (*SML2*)
54. Super Mario (*SML2*)
55. Fire Flower (*SML2*)
56. Fire Mario (*SML2*)
57. Carrot
58. Rabbit Mario


1864
II 19:30
ACTIVISION

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** PITFALL HARRY
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** PITFALL!
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** PITFALL! (2012)
- » **FINEST HOUR:** PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** SWINGING ON ROPES

Pitfall!

SWING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

» RETROREVIVAL

» ATARI 2600 » 1982 » ACTIVISION

Poor old Pitfall Harry, he's the gaming mascot no one seems to care about anymore. Aside from an iOS game in 2012 the explorer has been all but forgotten by Activision, which is a shame.

While I never owned an Atari 2600 growing up, I had a number of friends who did, so I frequently had the opportunity to play on one after school or at the weekends. Thanks to friends like Paul I was introduced to the likes of *Combat*, *Frostbite* and countless other classics, but the one that I always pestered Paul to play was *Pitfall!*.

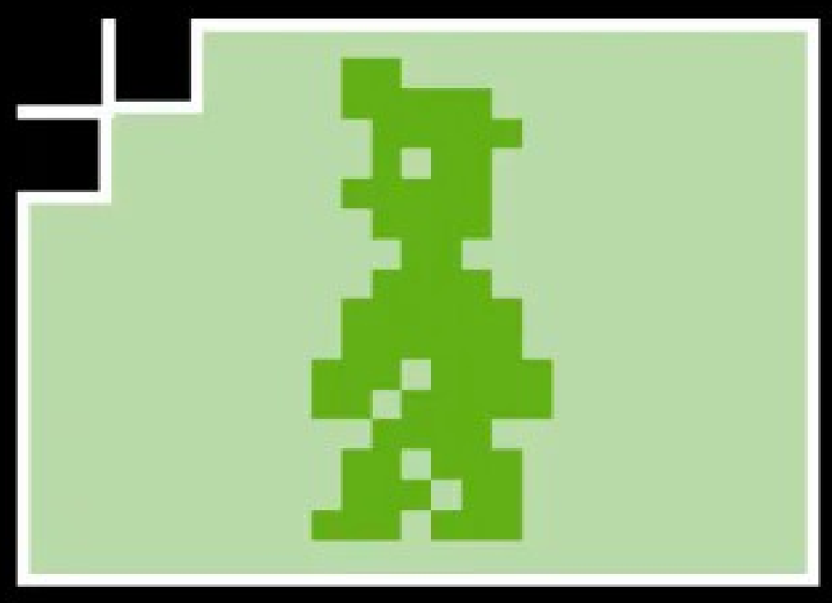
I loved *Pitfall!* and not just because it felt so advanced compared to many of the other 2600 games that Paul owned at the time. Pitfall Harry was every bit a draw to me as the game, mainly because I loved Indiana Jones (I used to make all my friends call me Indi-Darran Jones at school when both *Raiders Of The Lost Arc* and *Temple Of Doom* came out). Like Indiana Jones, Pitfall Harry explored jungles, loved treasure and was extremely athletic. For me, he was a hero to latch on to and latch on to him I did. *Pitfall!* would always be the game I asked to play whenever I visited a friend's house and it upset me greatly that the Amstrad never received a port, but the Commodore 64 did.

I would continue to follow the adventures of Pitfall Harry during the intervening years, and while he never rose to the same status as Mario or Sonic, I always used to be able to wring some enjoyment from his adventures. *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* was a solid 16-bit offering that featured the sort of splendiferous animation that was typically associated with the likes of Shiny Entertainment, while *Pitfall 3D: Beyond The Jungle* would reveal that Pitfall Harry sounded remarkably like Bruce Campbell.

The love affair for me, though, will always be with the original game, and while Pitfall Harry seems to now have been forgotten by Activision, he isn't lost to me. ✱

MINER WILLY

Forget portly plumbers, Britain's answer to a platform hero was a boozy prospector whose sole purpose in life was to simply sleep it off



ICON PROFILE

» **NAME:** MINER WILLY
» **FIRST APPEARANCE:** MANIC MINER
» **LAST SEEN IN:** JET SET RACING
» **FINEST HOUR:** JET SET WILLY
» **NOTABLE FOR:** MINING

Poor Willy. it's the morning after the night before and the hangover from the evening's frivolity has turned his immediate world into a tousled mess. But the sight of empty Day-Glo wine glasses are gradually helping him to unravel why his newly purchased mansion in Surbiton seems to have lost all pretentiousness on this blurry Sunday morning, and why a homeless person, lacking eyebrows, is wearing his smoking jacket and watching *The Hitman And Her* on his mammoth-screen television.

After earning millions from the riches he discovered in a mineshaft in Surbiton, inviting friends and stragglers round for a celebratory bash in his new swanky digs seemed like a great idea at the time. But the revellers have drunk his wine, trashed his home and made off with his Aston Martin. It's lucky, then, that Willy's both filthy rich and filthy lazy, so he can shirk the clean-up operation, curl up inside some warm Egyptian cotton sheets, and nurse his monster hangover.

But Willy's Italian housekeeper, Maria, takes a very dim view of all his debased partying and won't let him set foot inside his bedroom until he's gone around every inch of his oversized manor and collected up every remnant of last night's epic shindig. But Willy's mansion is so vast he's yet to actually explore every nook and cranny. So he'll have his work cut out for him when he discovers that the previous occupier – who vanished mysteriously – was an eccentric inventor, and that his peculiar and deadly creations are patrolling Willy's home.

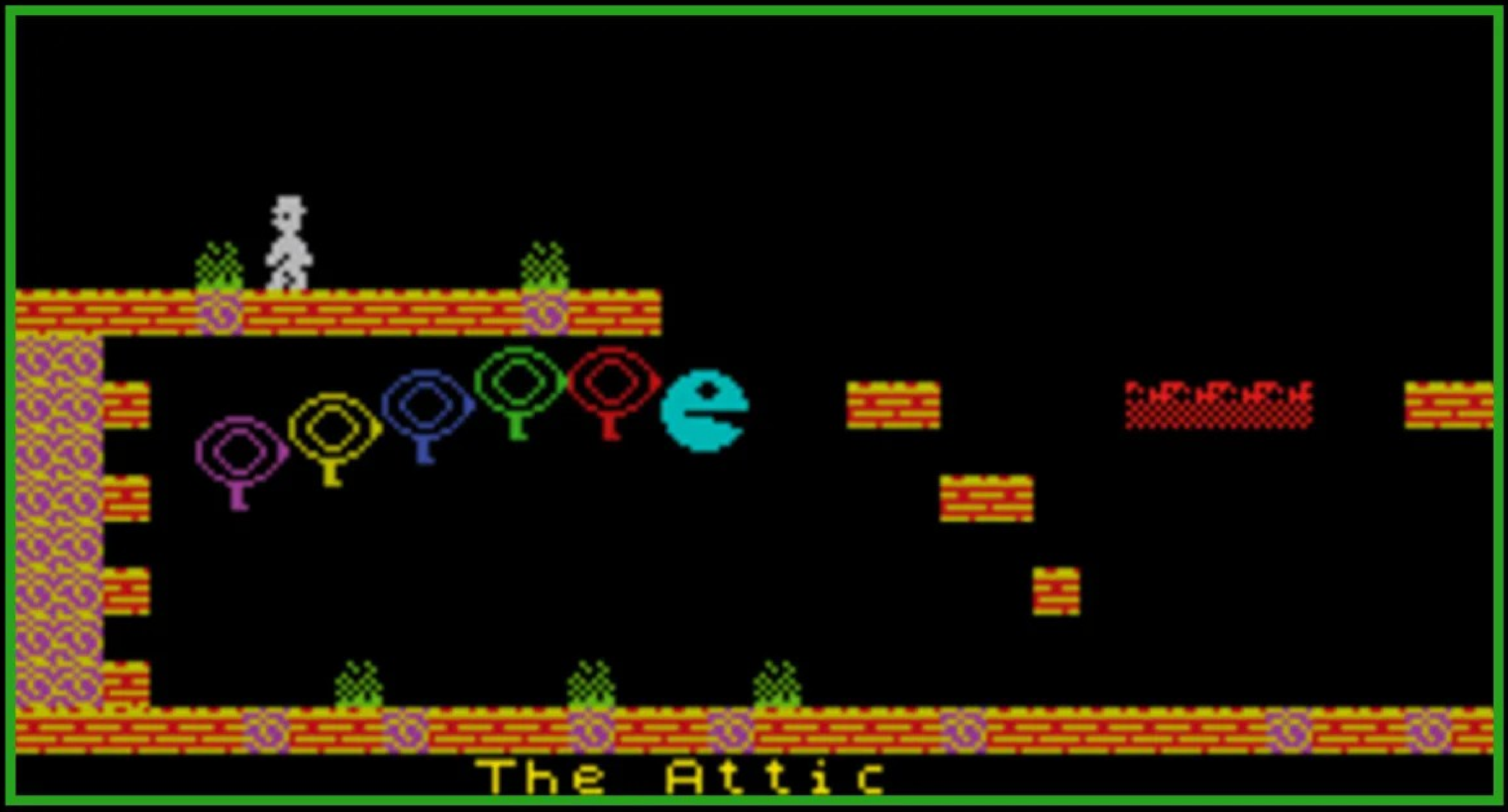
Matthew Smith was 16 when he wrote *Manic Miner* in his bedroom in Wallasey. Little did he know the impact his pint-sized prospector would have on the 8-bit colour-clash scene. Despite being 16 pixels high, six wide, one colour, tacit, and blessed with three movements – left, right, and jump – Miner Willy struck a chord with the British public. For many, *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*'s satirical platform exploits came to represent a sly pop at the glum state of economical depression Britain was experiencing in the early-Eighties. While Willy's vocation and gameplay may have borrowed from Bill Hogue's classic *Miner 2049er,* it's worth noting that when *Manic Miner* was released you'd struggle to find a more British archetype than a downtrodden miner trying to make a better life.

Juxtaposing whatever political flag-waving Willy was or wasn't doing; his games were also plied with peculiar Python-esque imagery, humour and irreverent surrealism, all of which would help him to find immediate appeal. Every facet of the Willy games – from the hypnotically animated enemies to the peculiar-themed levels – gelled. Like well-oiled cogs in a rambunctious cuckoo clock. And the clockmaker, well let's just say Smith's legendary status would match even Willy himself. Creating a wake of mystery, there was a rumour that Matthew Smith was a codename for a secret super computer or a specialist team of super-human programmers.

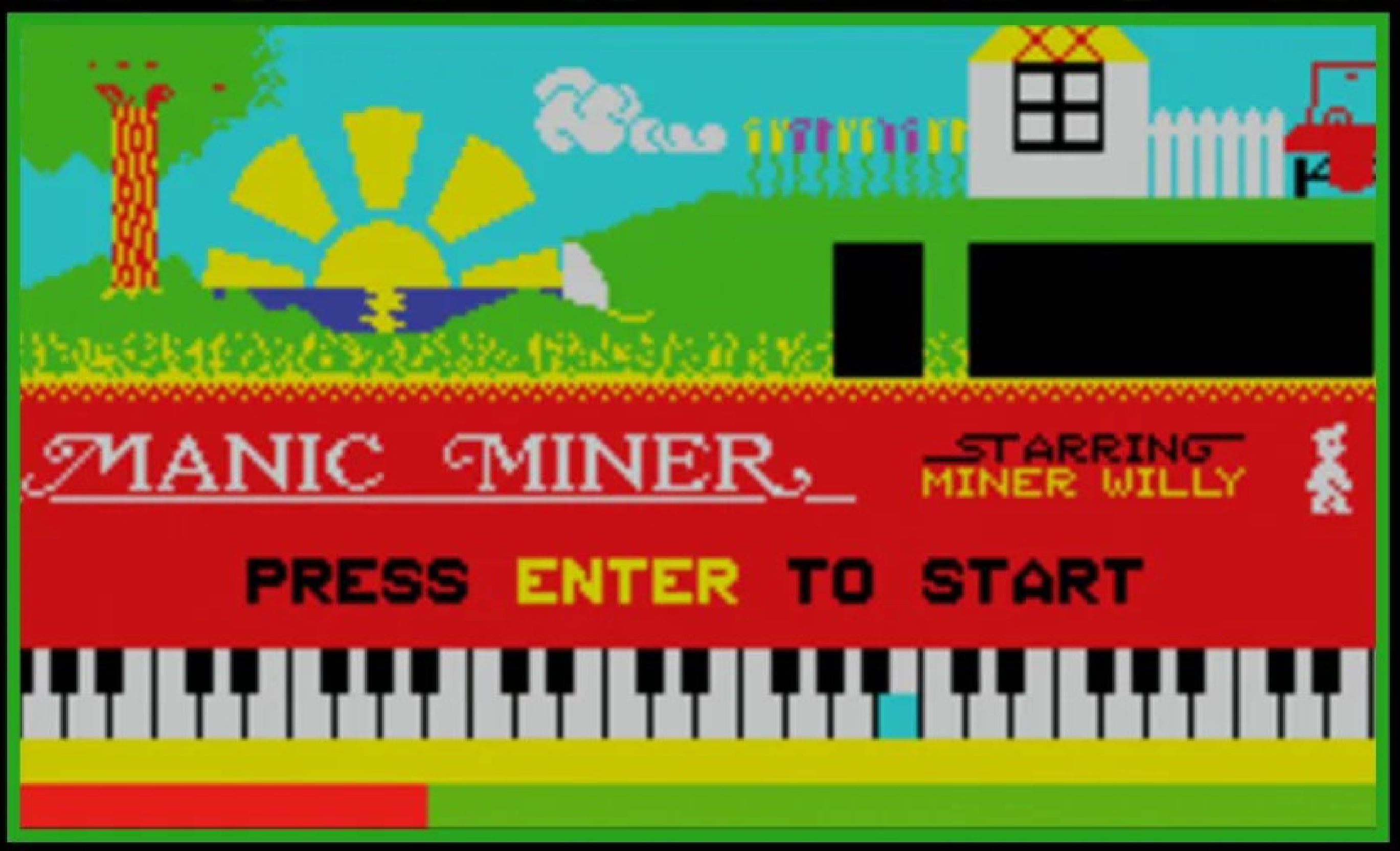
Around 1990, after making a lot of dosh from the Miner Willy games, Smith mysteriously vanished off the face of the planet, leading fans to wildly speculate on what had sparked his sudden disappearance. The homebrew community lit up with fantastical but surprisingly specific rumours about Smith's whereabouts. Some believe he was in a mental institution, others that he was living in a commune in the Netherlands. Some even believed he travelled Europe fixing motorbikes. Regardless of where Smith went, the wanderer would eventually return. He now lives back in his old family home, with his mum and occassionally visits game shows.

> "There was a rumour that Matthew Smith was a codename for a team of super-human progammers"

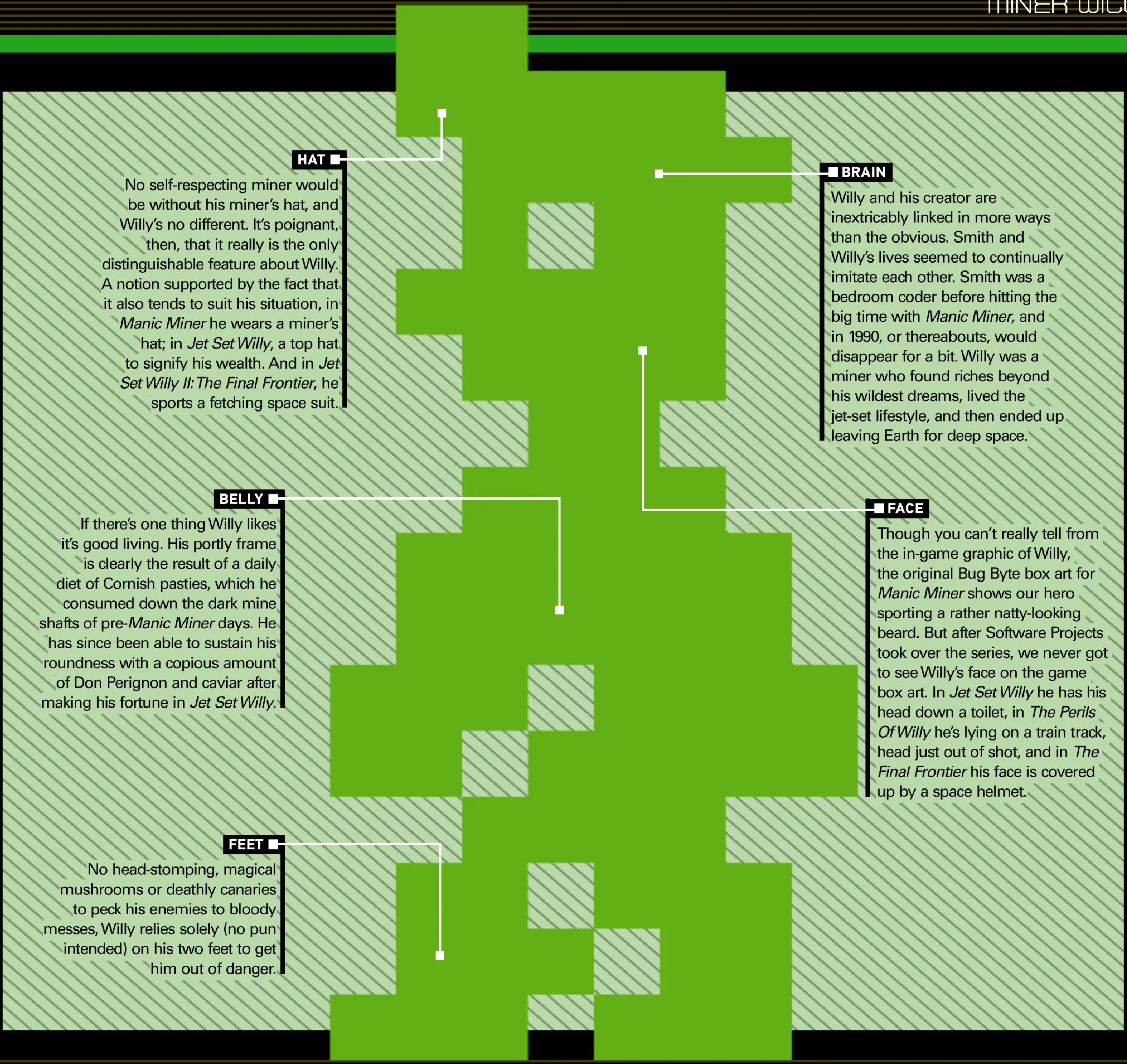
So what happened to Miner Willy? Well, save for the curio that was *The Perils Of Willy* on Vic-20 and a licensed karting spin-ff game called *Jet Set Racing,* Willy's last official misadventure was *Jet Set Willy II: The Final Frontier,* a peculiar expansion of *Jet Set Willy.* Willy donned a space suit to make one giant leap into outer space – a subtle allegory for his astronomical rise to stardom? We reckon so. *



» Some levels in *Jet Set Willy* are surprisingly easy to navigate, others will give Willy nightmares.



» *Manic Miner* was a fantastic debut for Miner Willy and remains great fun today.



HAT

No self-respecting miner would be without his miner's hat, and Willy's no different. It's poignant, then, that it really is the only distinguishable feature about Willy. A notion supported by the fact that it also tends to suit his situation, in *Manic Miner* he wears a miner's hat; in *Jet Set Willy*, a top hat to signify his wealth. And in *Jet Set Willy II: The Final Frontier*, he sports a fetching space suit.

BRAIN

Willy and his creator are inextricably linked in more ways than the obvious. Smith and Willy's lives seemed to continually imitate each other. Smith was a bedroom coder before hitting the big time with *Manic Miner*, and in 1990, or thereabouts, would disappear for a bit. Willy was a miner who found riches beyond his wildest dreams, lived the jet-set lifestyle, and then ended up leaving Earth for deep space.

BELLY

If there's one thing Willy likes it's good living. His portly frame is clearly the result of a daily diet of Cornish pasties, which he consumed down the dark mine shafts of pre-*Manic Miner* days. He has since been able to sustain his roundness with a copious amount of Don Perignon and caviar after making his fortune in *Jet Set Willy*.

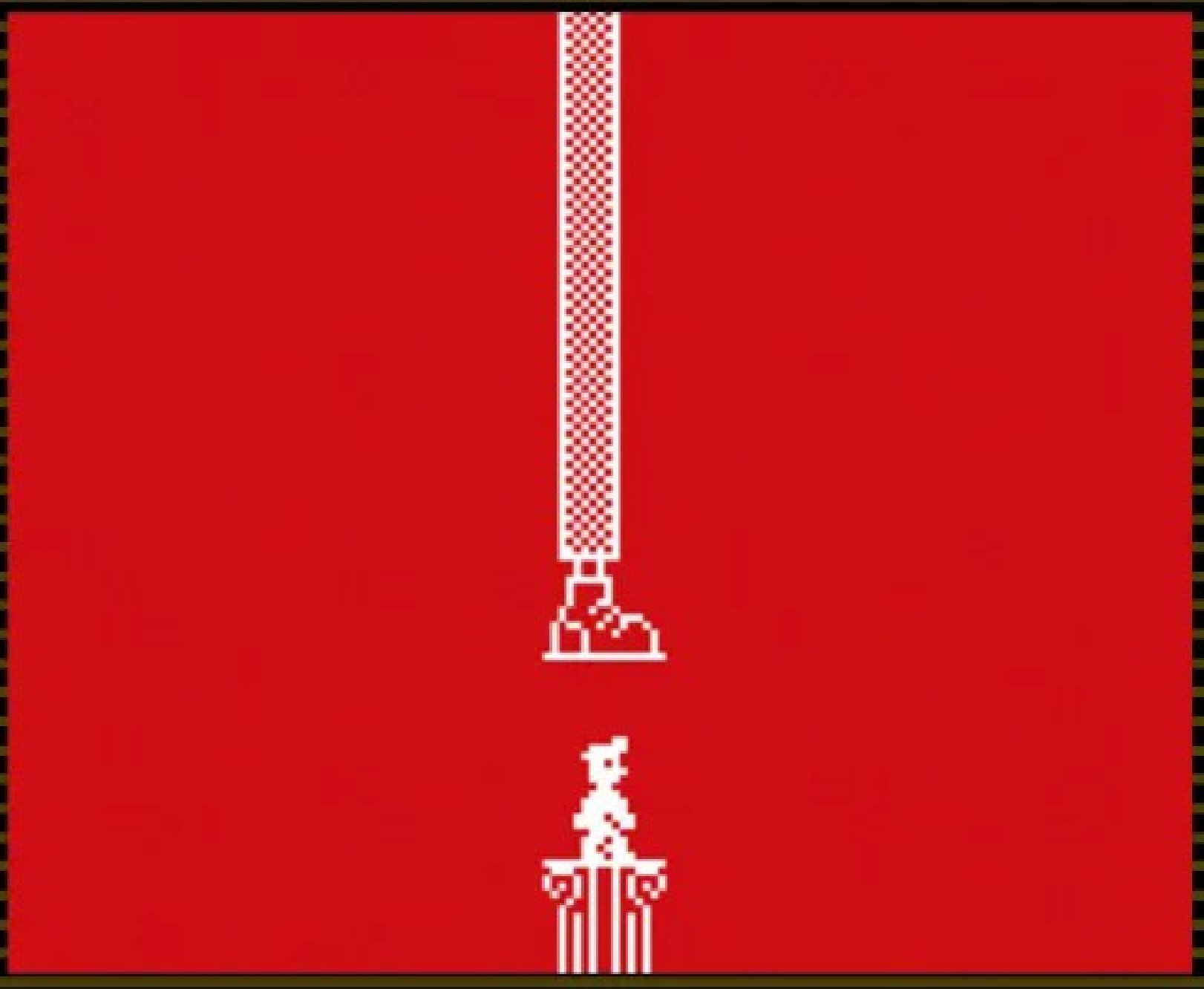
FACE

Though you can't really tell from the in-game graphic of Willy, the original Bug Byte box art for *Manic Miner* shows our hero sporting a rather natty-looking beard. But after Software Projects took over the series, we never got to see Willy's face on the game box art. In *Jet Set Willy* he has his head down a toilet, in *The Perils Of Willy* he's lying on a train track, head just out of shot, and in *The Final Frontier* his face is covered up by a space helmet.

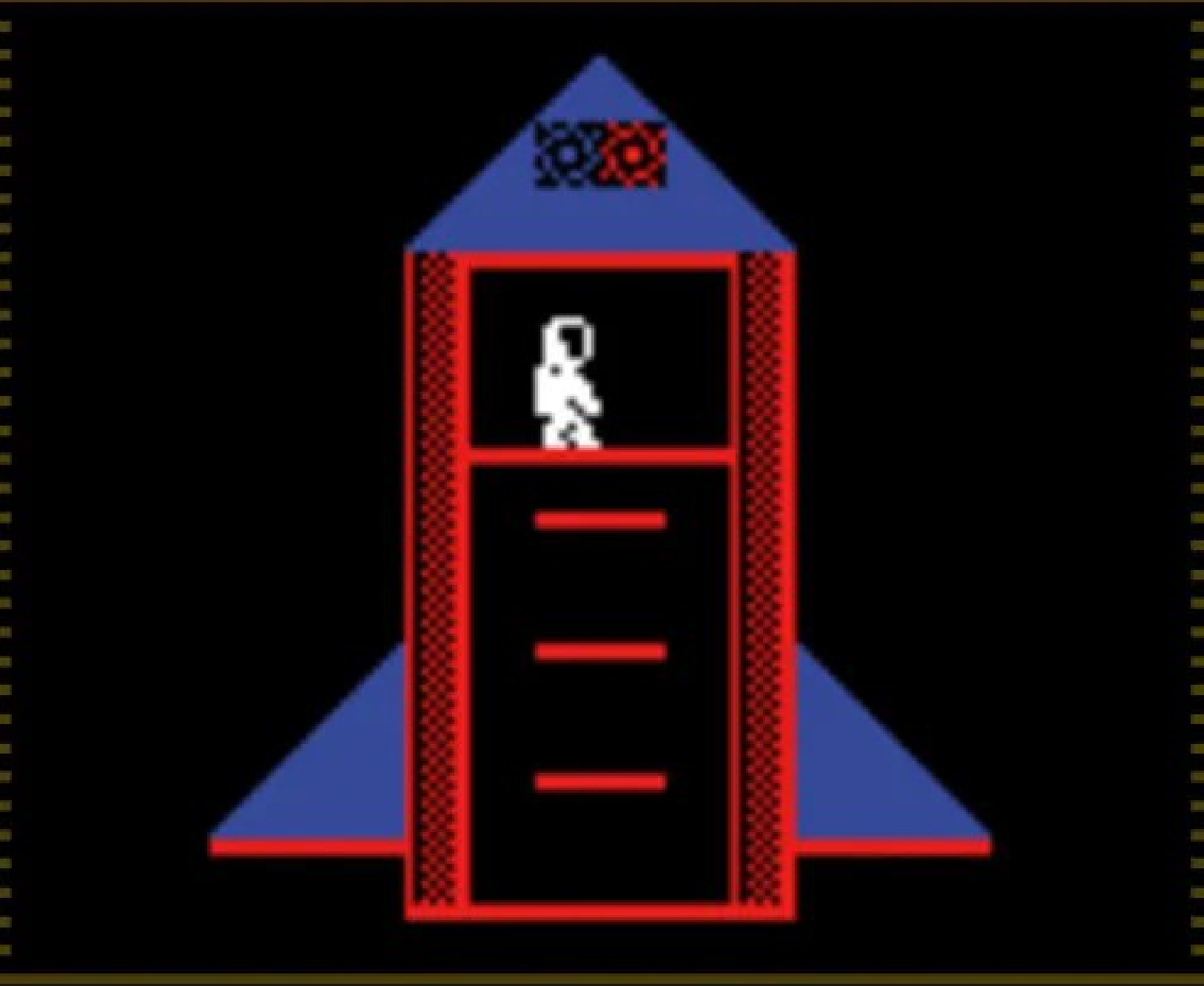
FEET

No head-stomping, magical mushrooms or deathly canaries to peck his enemies to bloody messes, Willy relies solely (no pun intended) on his two feet to get him out of danger.

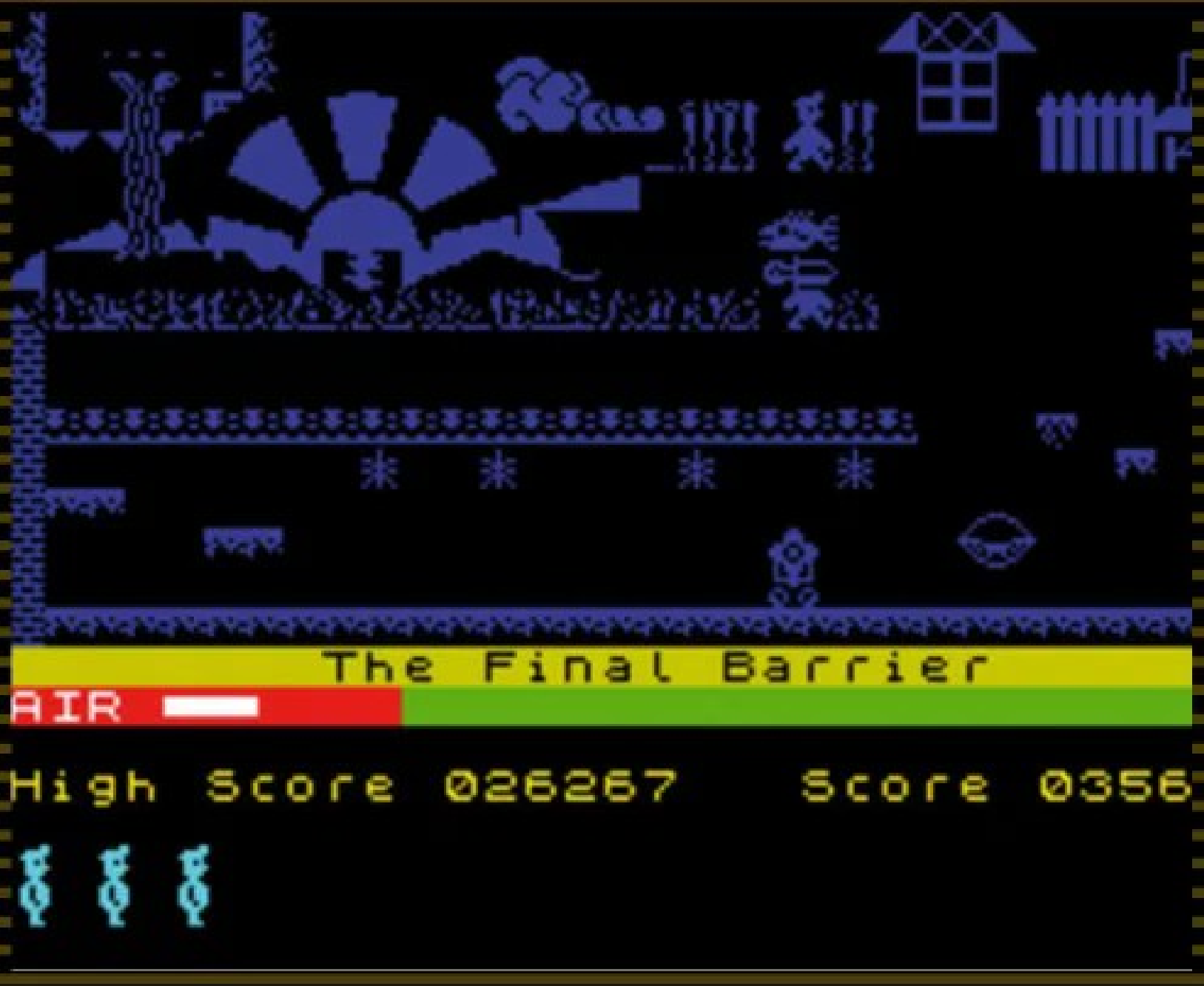
> MAGIC MOMENTS



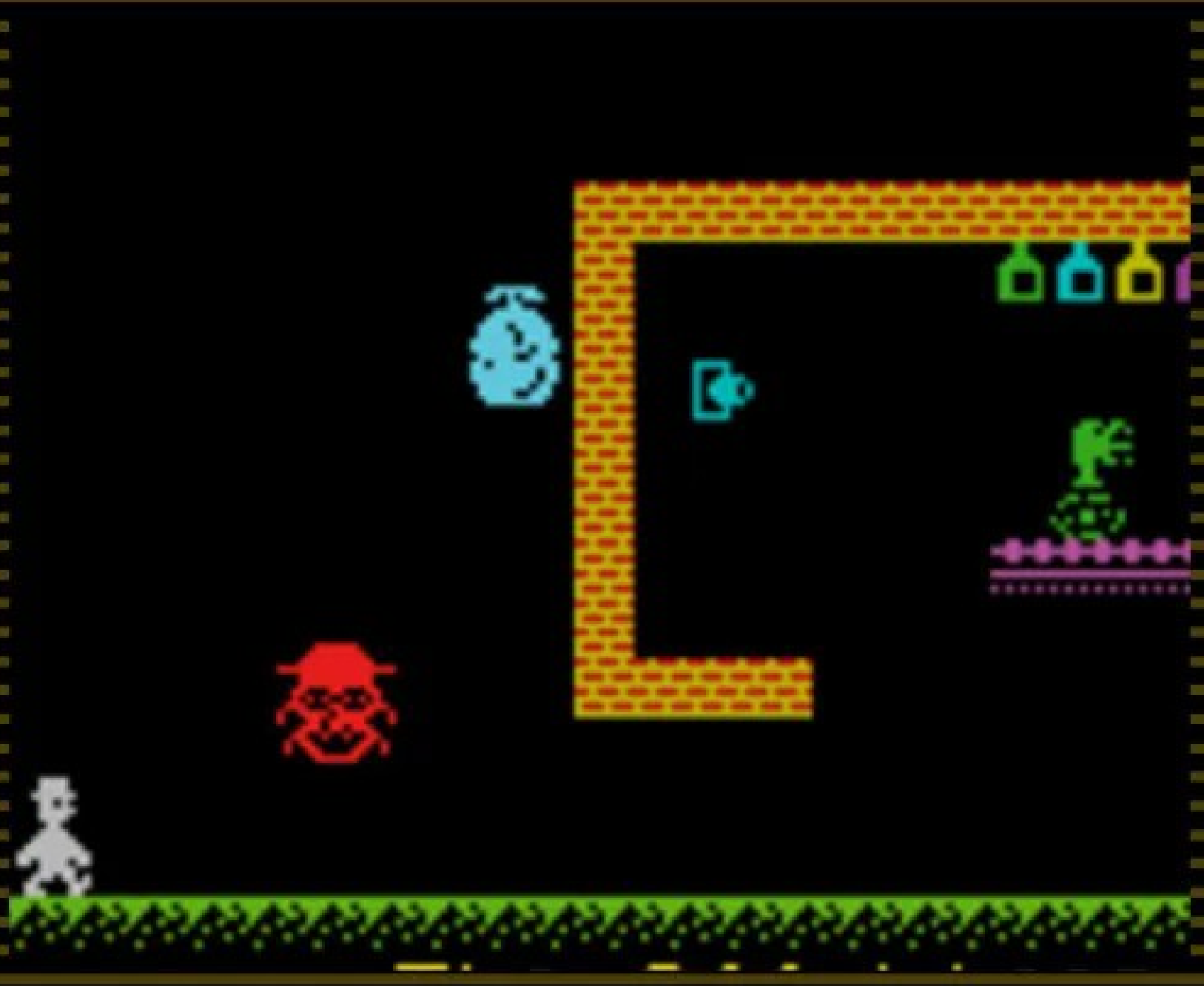
■ Clearly a nod to Monty Python, Willy gets squashed by God's foot.



■ Willy enters the Rocket Room and prepares for blast off.



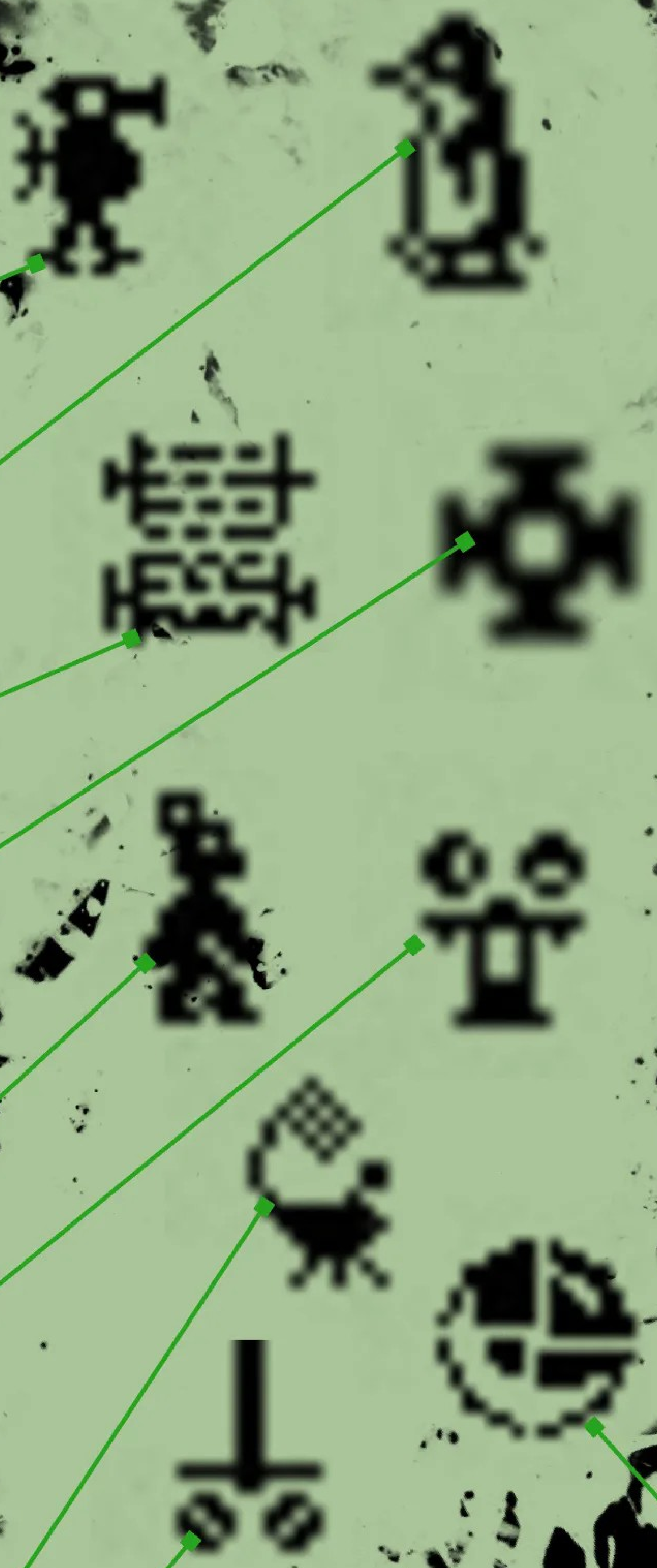
■ Ah. Willy reaches the final screen in *Manic Miner*. The stage recycles the title graphics.



■ Willy saunters down to the offie in need of the hair of the dog.

MINER WILLY RORSCHACH TEST

We couldn't talk about Miner Willy without mentioning some of the bizarre and peculiar enemies the poor prospector has had to avoid in his lifetime. Join us and take the Miner Willy Rorschach test



FIND HIM IN:
Central cavern
LOOKS LIKE:
A wind-up toy with a megaphone for a head

FIND HIM IN:
The cold room
LOOKS LIKE:
A nun ice-skating while smoking a cigar

FIND HIM IN:
East wall base
LOOKS LIKE:
A game of foosball

FIND HIM IN:
Processing plant
LOOKS LIKE:
Those handy Meccano connection sections

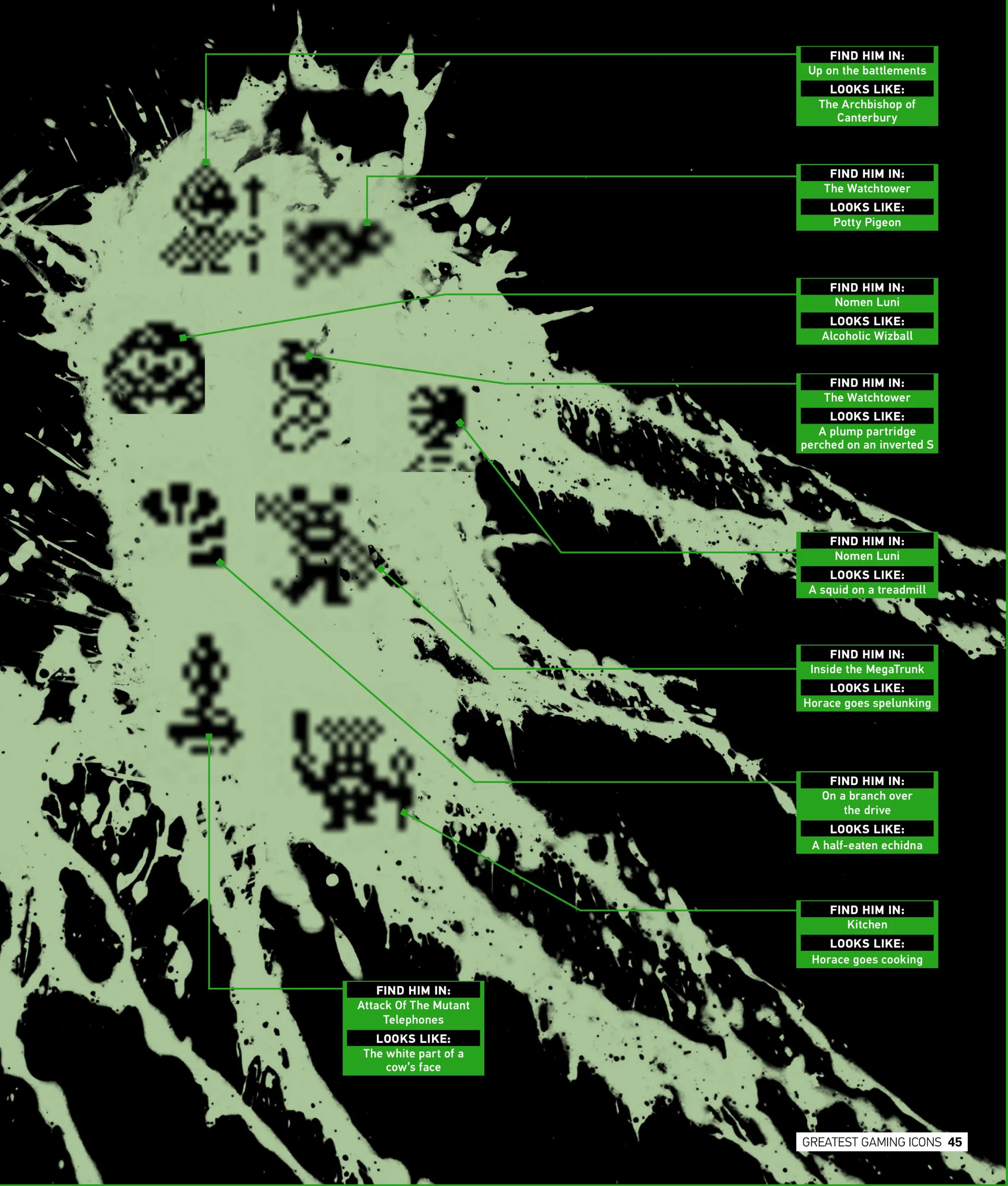
FIND HIM IN:
Endorian Forest
LOOKS LIKE:
A giant bipedal rabbit

FIND HIM IN:
Ore refinery
LOOKS LIKE:
A powerful golden wizard juggling two kittens

FIND HIM IN:
The sixteenth cavern
LOOKS LIKE:
A football hooligan disguised as a scorpion waving a football rattle

FIND HIM IN:
Amoebatrons' Revenge
LOOKS LIKE:
Something that's best kept to ourselves

FIND HIM IN:
Solar power generator
LOOKS LIKE:
A transparent zorbing banana



FIND HIM IN:
Up on the battlements
LOOKS LIKE:
The Archbishop of Canterbury

FIND HIM IN:
The Watchtower
LOOKS LIKE:
Potty Pigeon

FIND HIM IN:
Nomen Luni
LOOKS LIKE:
Alcoholic Wizball

FIND HIM IN:
The Watchtower
LOOKS LIKE:
A plump partridge perched on an inverted S

FIND HIM IN:
Nomen Luni
LOOKS LIKE:
A squid on a treadmill

FIND HIM IN:
Inside the MegaTrunk
LOOKS LIKE:
Horace goes spelunking

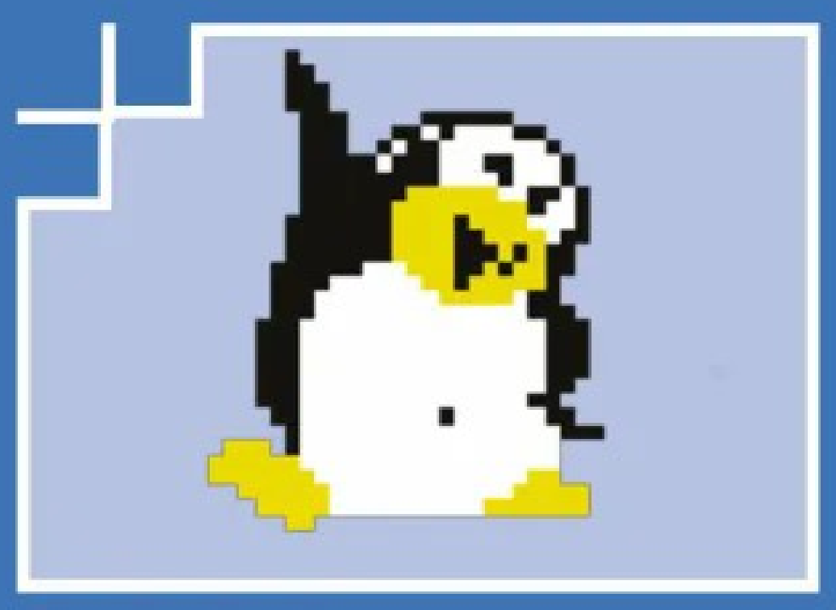
FIND HIM IN:
On a branch over the drive
LOOKS LIKE:
A half-eaten echidna

FIND HIM IN:
Kitchen
LOOKS LIKE:
Horace goes cooking

FIND HIM IN:
Attack Of The Mutant Telephones
LOOKS LIKE:
The white part of a cow's face

PENTA

Everybody needs a mascot and in the early days of gaming, Konami plumped for a cute penguin who would go on to have an equally memorable son. Meet Penta the penguin



ICON PROFILE

» NAME: PENTA

» FIRST APPEARANCE: ANTARCTIC ADVENTURE

» LAST SEEN IN: KONAMI PIXEL PUZZLE COLLECTION

» FINEST HOUR: PENGUIN ADVENTURE

» NOTABLE FOR: SLIDING

From racing feathered friends in *Super Mario 64* to the Prinnies of *Disgaea*, penguins have become as much a part of Japanese videogame design as vehicle sections have of Western games. It's a cultural fascination that predates recent phenomena like *March Of The Penguins* and *Happy Feet*, going back to the unexpected success of Swiss animated series *Pingu*.

Entire shops dedicated just to Pingu merchandise can be found on the streets of Tokyo. However, while Japan has produced a handful of Pingu videogames in its time, he actually isn't the most prolific of videogame penguins. That honour goes to Penta, an original Konami creation from 1983, who has endured to this day.

Penta made his debut in *Antarctic Adventure*, an unremarkable MSX game that took the player on an into-the-screen journey around research stations in Antarctica. Later converted to other 8-bit formats, the most interesting thing about *Antarctic Adventure* is arguably the US box to the Colecovision release, which features a real penguin, joypad in hand, controlling the cartoon Pent. Which, as we all know, is ludicrous. As Yuji Naka once revealed, the only game a penguin can play is Prope's cardboard box-controlled *Let's Tap*.

Unlike most Hall Of Famers, Penta didn't gain much popularity in his original game, and instead caught most attention in his sequel and subsequent appearances. Released exclusively on MSX, *Penguin Adventure* was a big improvement and built upon the formula of the original with multiple levels encompassing swimming and flying sections, and a variety of power-ups, secret areas, an ever-changing soundtrack, and even boss battles to keep the game feeling fresh.

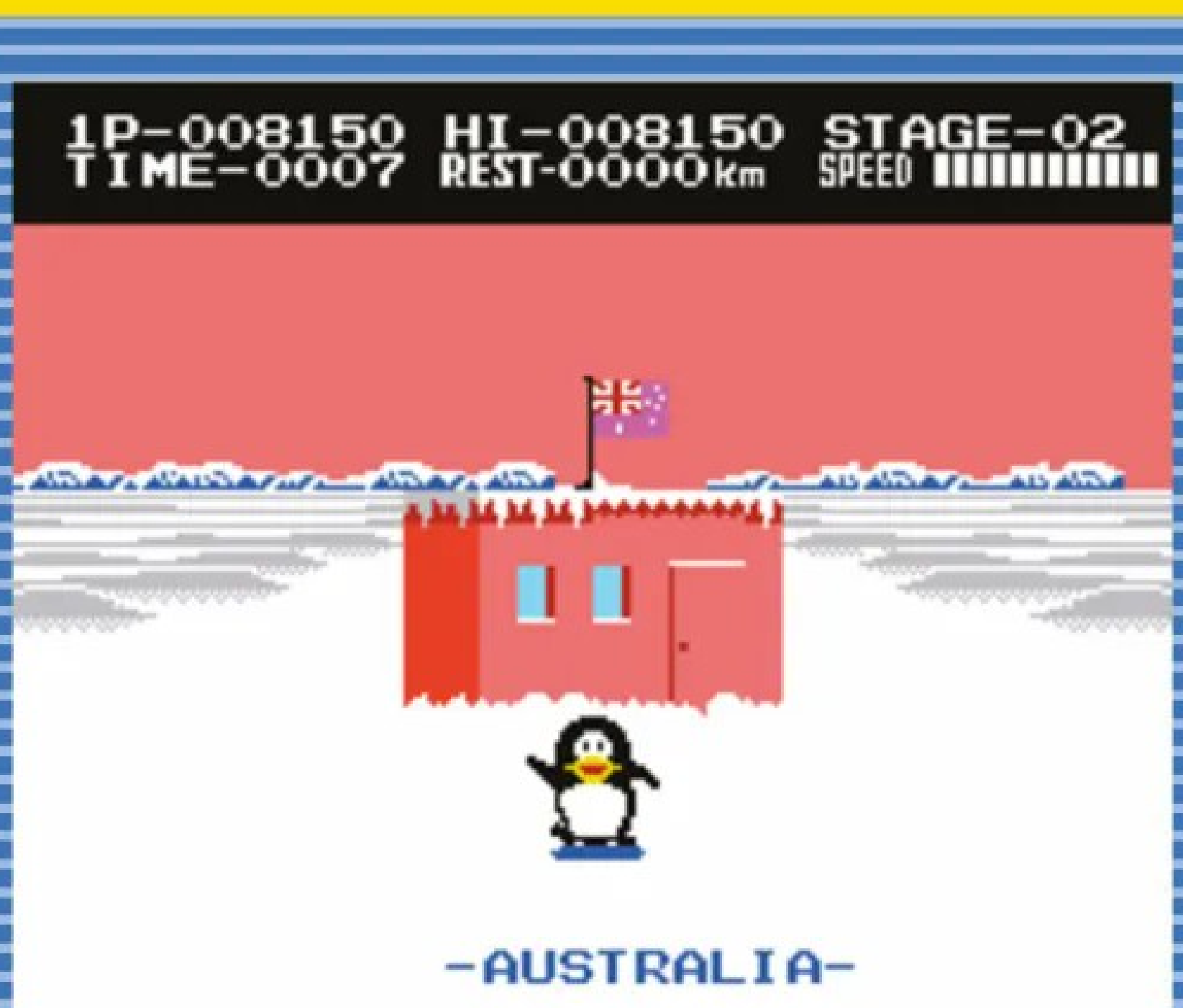
This increased focus on fun made *Penguin Adventure* one of the most fondly remembered MSX games ever made. But it was the added depth given to Penta himself that would ensure he rose above the series that introduced him to the world. From the title screen onward – in which our hero sheds a single tear in tribute to his lost love – *Penguin Adventure* infuses Penta with more character than any 8-bit sprite has a right to enjoy making him one of the easiest 8-bit characters to like. No wonder he's been an unofficial mascot for Konami ever since.

Penta's third and final starring role, *Yume Penguin Monogatari*, brought a change of platform and genre to the penguin. Moving over to the Famicom, he found himself in a platform game and also found that his girlfriend had decided to leave him, despite the fact that he saved her life in the previous game. The reason? "I can't stand fat guys like you," she says while clinging on to her new boyfriend. Vowing to lose weight and get his girl back, Penta sets off on a new adventure in the hope of shedding a few pounds but finds the odds stacked against him as a bunch of enemies attack, cruelly attempting to throw food into his mouth to keep his BMI high. Stay on the chubby side and Penta slows down, his attack reduced to a clumsy bellyflop. Lose weight and he can use more athletic abilities. It's a brilliantly inventive idea for a platform game, and used physical comedy as well as an emotional plot device to reinforce the bond between player and Penta.

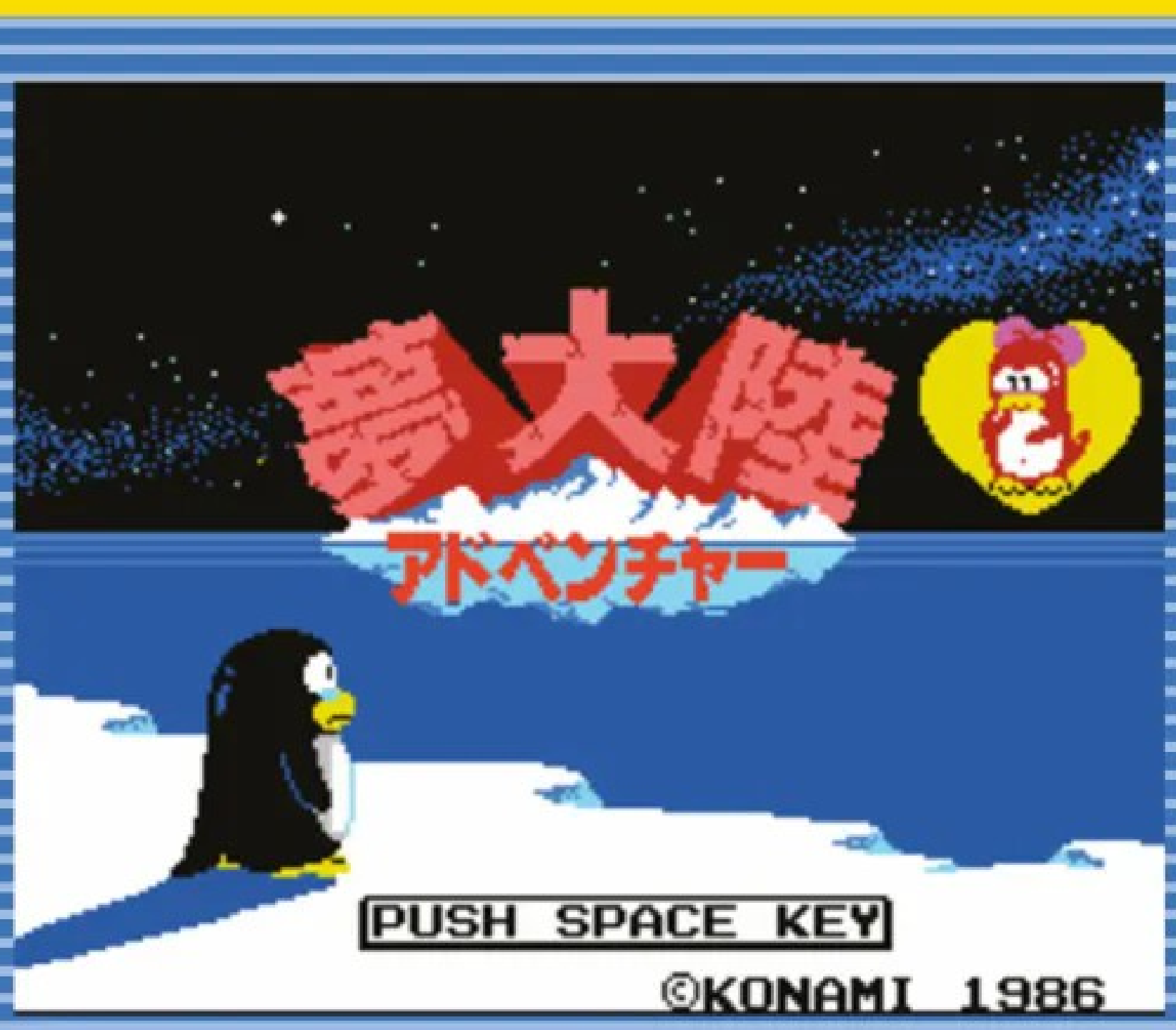
Released exclusively in Japan in 1991, *Yume Penguin Monogatari* went virtually unnoticed, only rising to cult status in the emulation age. By then, however, Penta was much better known for a different series of games – the *Gradius*-based comedy shoot-'em-up *Parodius*. Launched in 1988 on MSX and followed by sequels across multiple formats, the series featured a wealth of playable characters, both brand new and borrowed from classic Konami games of old.

Penta was one of a handful of characters to feature in the original *Parodius* MSX game. He was replaced in the sequels by his son, Pentarou. As well as making cameo appearances in Konami's NES crossover series *Wai Wai World*, he has also been revived for a couple of modern games, such as iPhone's *Krazy Kart Racers* and DS's *New International Track & Field*, making him one of the publisher's most prolific guest stars. Here's hoping Konami's recent focus on retro means a return is in the works. ★

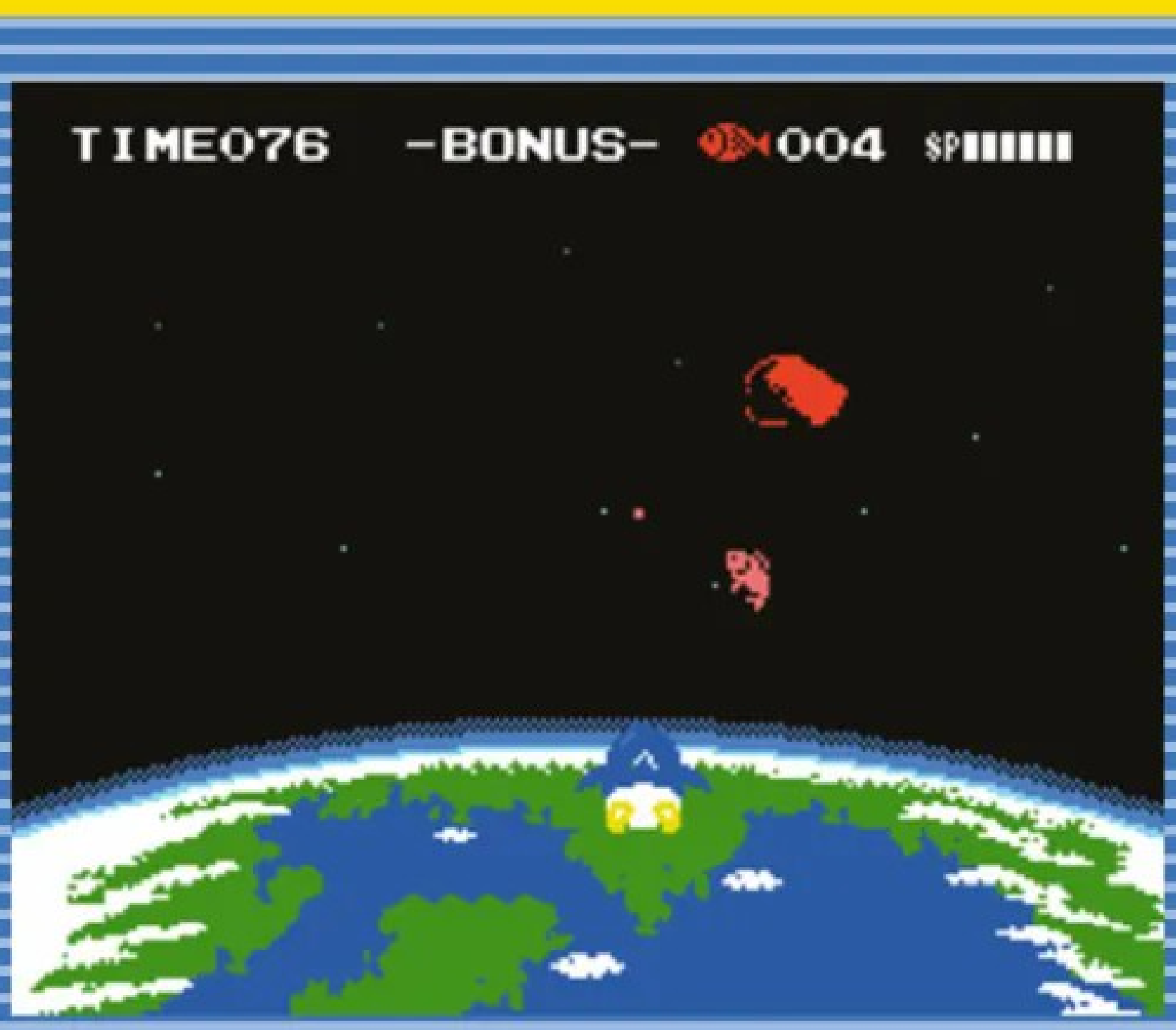
> MAGIC MOMENTS



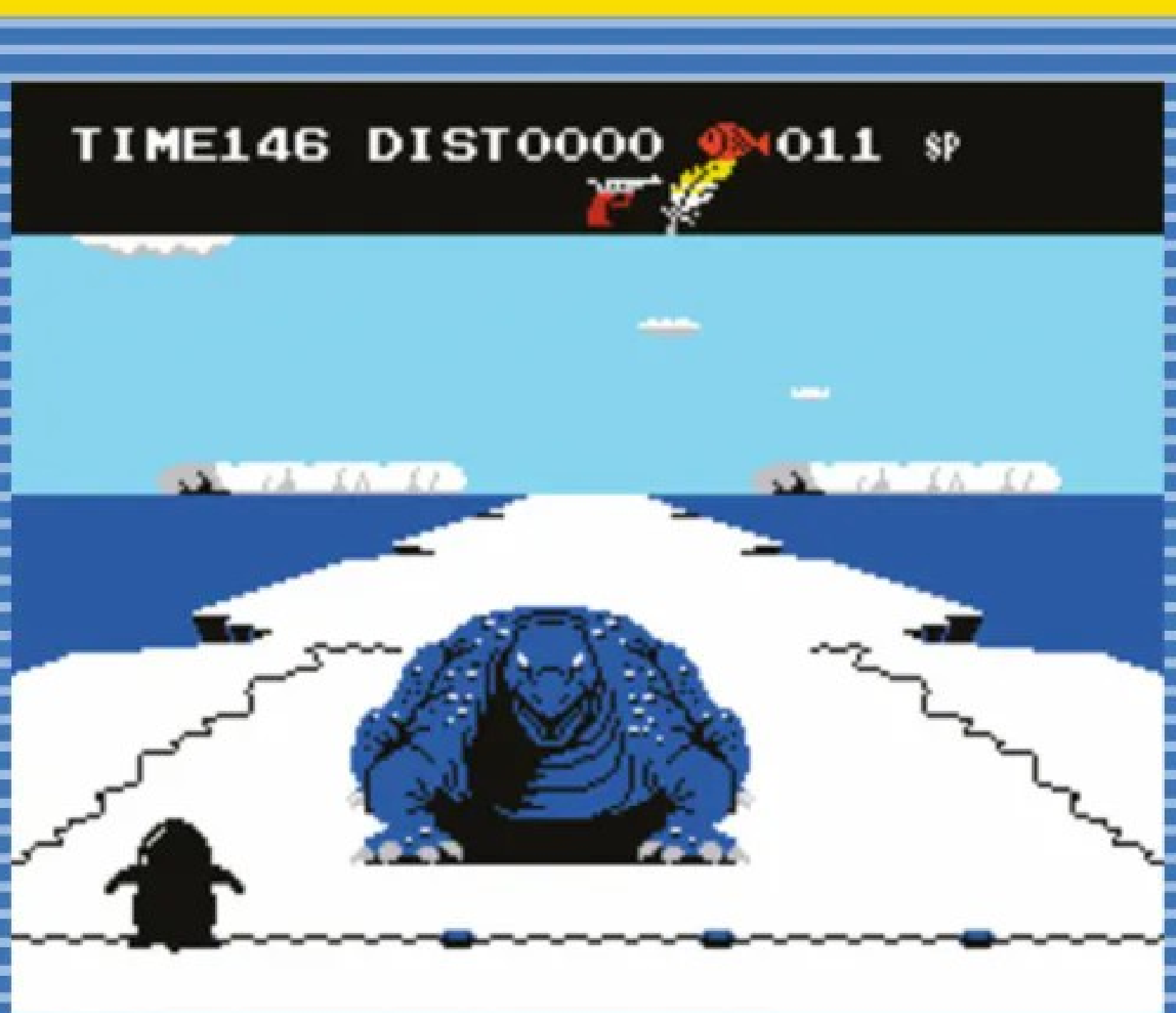
■ Penta's debut appearance was okay but nothing special. It attracted very little attention.



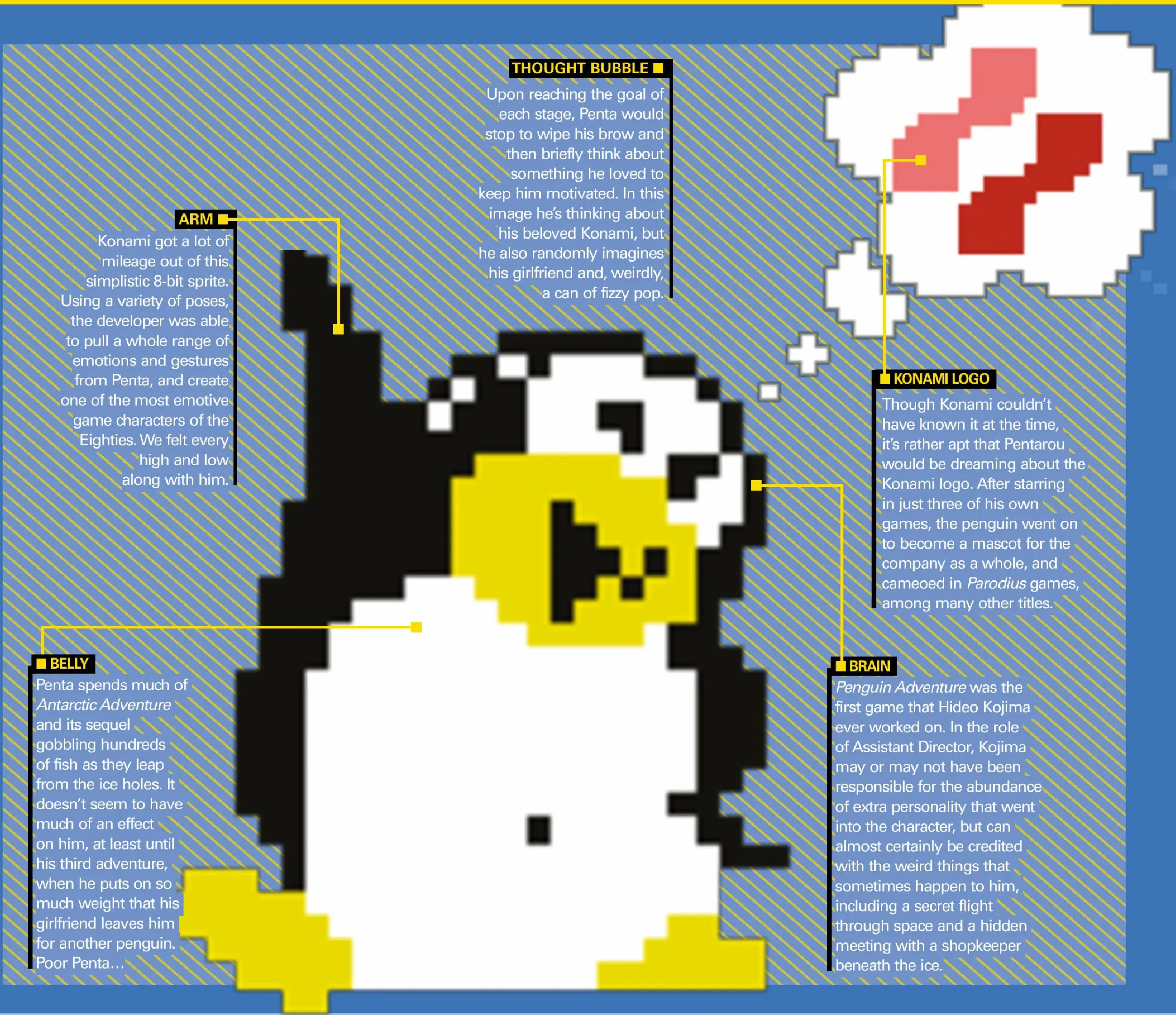
■ The title screen to *Penguin Adventure*. One of the most heart wrenching screens in 8-bit history.



■ *Penguin Adventure* is packed full of fun secrets, like this flight through space.



■ *Penguin Adventure*'s boss battles required you break the ice and send a dragon to his demise.



THOUGHT BUBBLE

Upon reaching the goal of each stage, Penta would stop to wipe his brow and then briefly think about something he loved to keep him motivated. In this image he's thinking about his beloved Konami, but he also randomly imagines his girlfriend and, weirdly, a can of fizzy pop.

ARM

Konami got a lot of mileage out of this simplistic 8-bit sprite. Using a variety of poses, the developer was able to pull a whole range of emotions and gestures from Penta, and create one of the most emotive game characters of the Eighties. We felt every high and low along with him.

KONAMI LOGO

Though Konami couldn't have known it at the time, it's rather apt that Pentarou would be dreaming about the Konami logo. After starring in just three of his own games, the penguin went on to become a mascot for the company as a whole, and cameoed in *Parodius* games, among many other titles.

BELLY

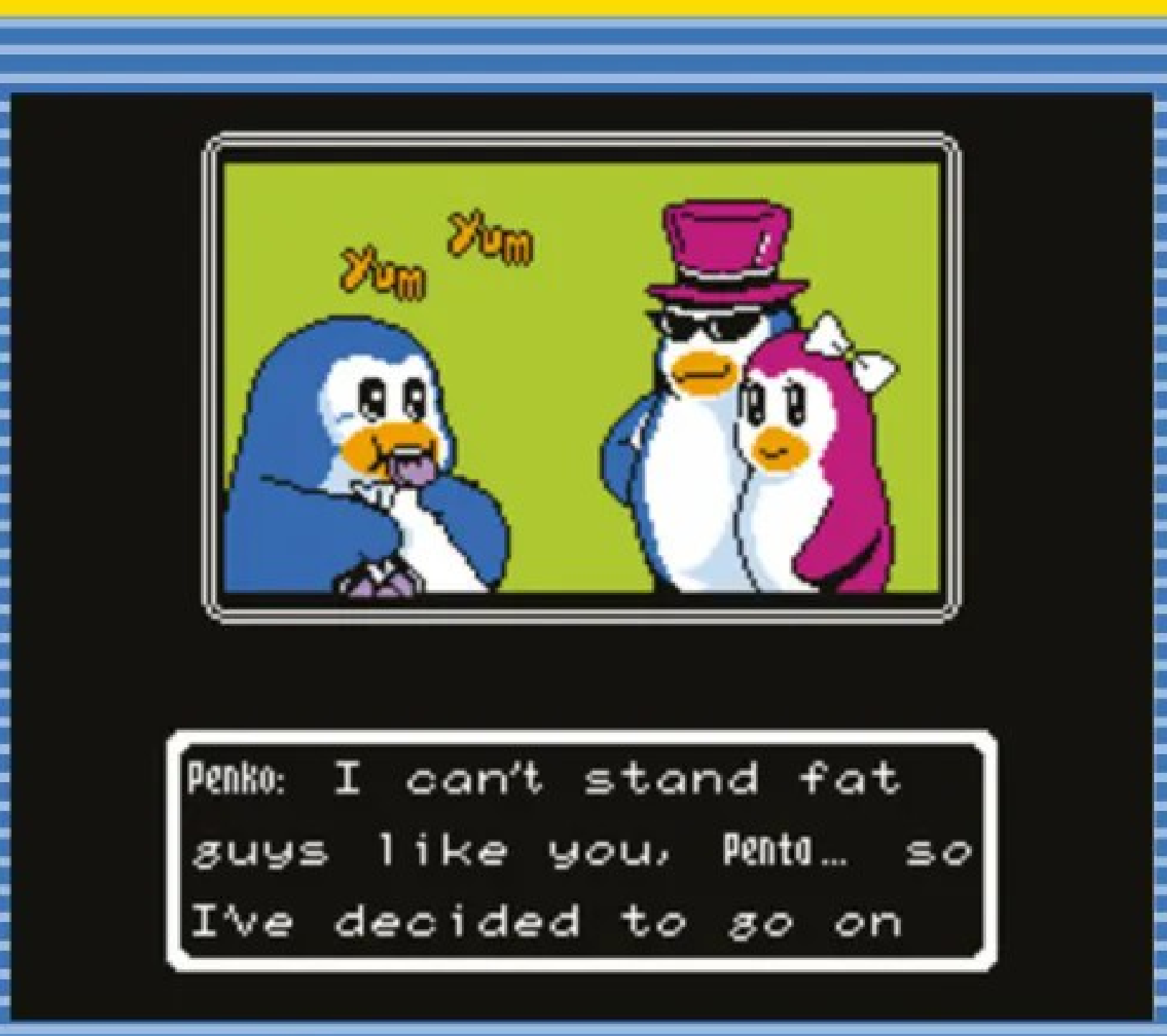
Penta spends much of *Antarctic Adventure* and its sequel gobbling hundreds of fish as they leap from the ice holes. It doesn't seem to have much of an effect on him, at least until his third adventure, when he puts on so much weight that his girlfriend leaves him for another penguin. Poor Penta…

BRAIN

Penguin Adventure was the first game that Hideo Kojima ever worked on. In the role of Assistant Director, Kojima may or may not have been responsible for the abundance of extra personality that went into the character, but can almost certainly be credited with the weird things that sometimes happen to him, including a secret flight through space and a hidden meeting with a shopkeeper beneath the ice.

TIME146 DIST0000 011 SP

■ Beat the boss and Penta is joined by a troupe of dancing penguin friends to celebrate.



Penko: I can't stand fat guys like you, Penta… so I've decided to go on

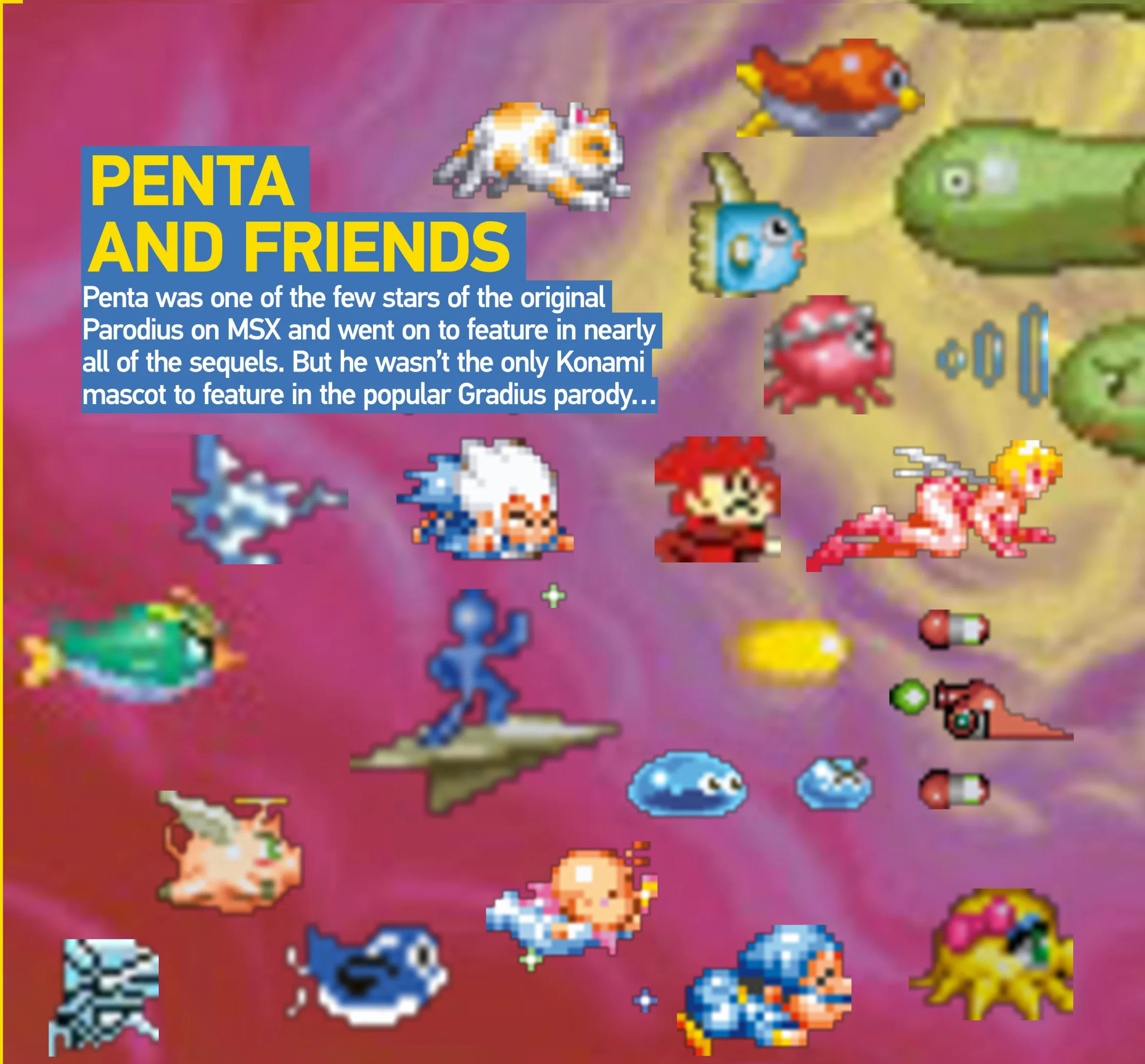
■ The opening to *Yume Penguin Monogatari* finds our hero overweight and under-loved.

■ Losing weight isn't easy when distant volcanoes try to fire rice cakes into your mouth.

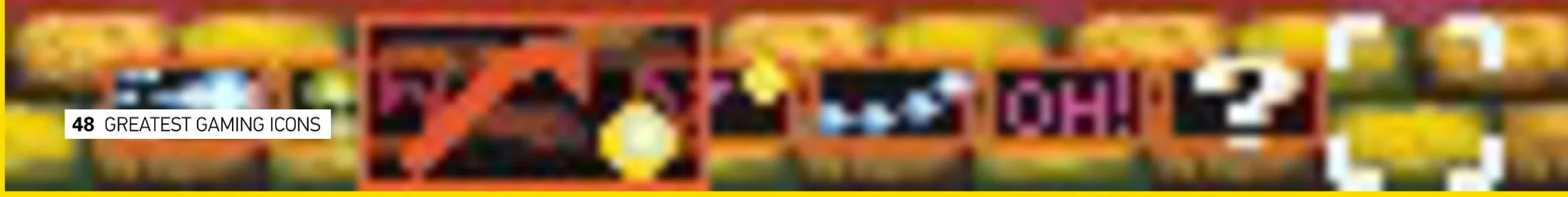
■ Penta has enjoyed a revival lately. Perhaps we could have Penguin Adventure Rebirth next?

PENTA AND FRIENDS

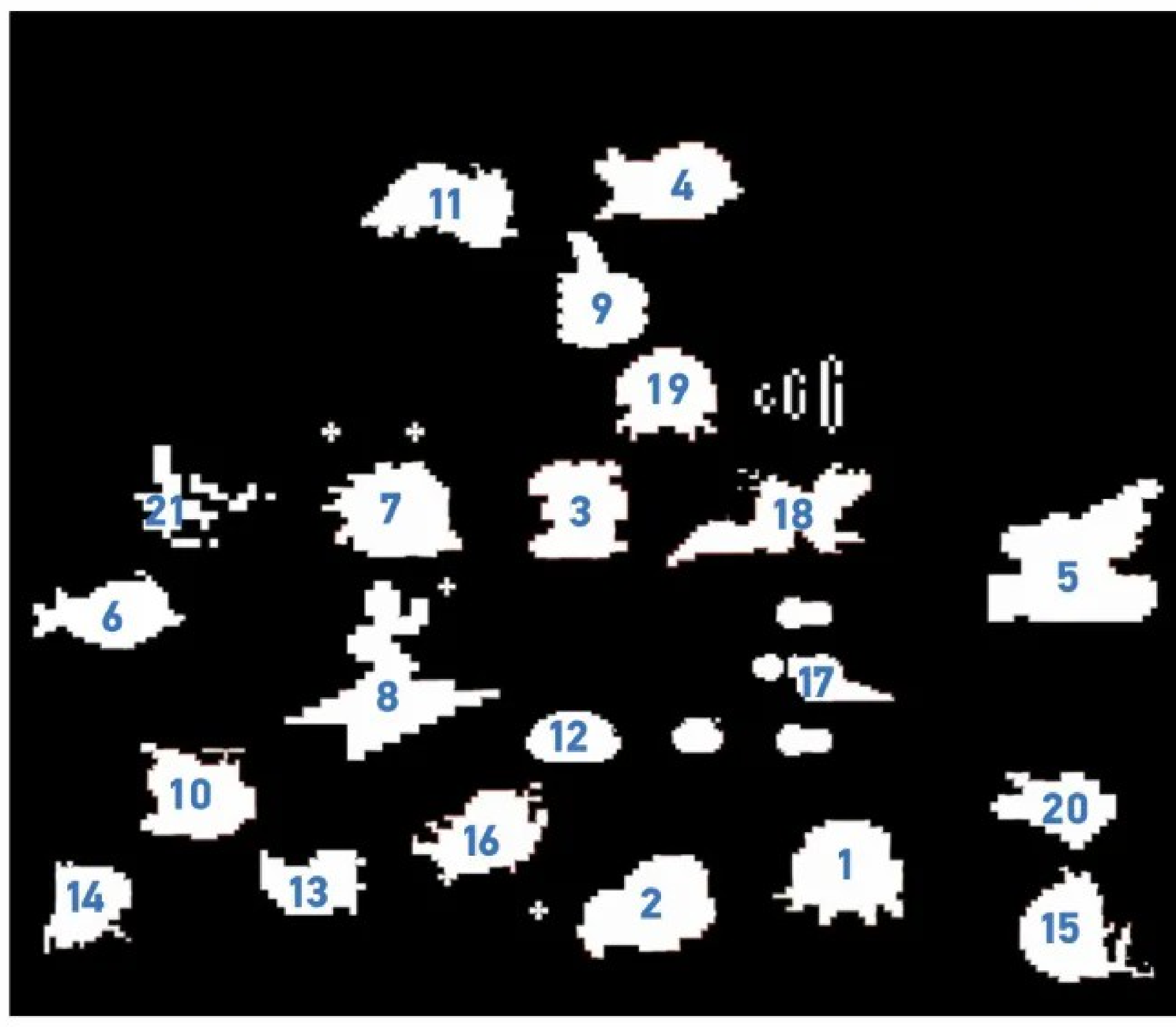
Penta was one of the few stars of the original Parodius on MSX and went on to feature in nearly all of the sequels. But he wasn't the only Konami mascot to feature in the popular Gradius parody…



■ **1. Belial** - A female counterpart to *Parodius*'s octopus star Takosuke.
■ **2. Ebisumara** - The sidekick to Goemon (of *Mystical Ninja* fame) appears as a player character in *Fantastic Parodius* on SNES.
■ **3. Goemon** - The star of *Mystical Ninja* appeared in the very first *Parodius* and then disappeared again, only to reappear in the SNES version of *Fantastic Parodius*.
■ **4. Hanako** - The player 2 version of Pentarou, similar to the girlfriend in *Penguin Adventure* and *Yume Penguin Monogatari*.
■ **5. Hikaru** - This rocket-riding bunny girl is an original *Parodius* creation and an influence on the stars of *Parodius* spin-off *Otomedius*.
■ **6. Ivan** - Though Pentarou is sadly absent from 1996's *Sexy Parodius*, he is replaced by Ivan – a green emperor penguin with a mean attitude. He sports an aggressive looking combat jacket in the cut-scenes.
■ **7. Kid Dracula** - From the game of the same name, this is actually *Castlevania*'s Alucard as a child. Only appears in the SNES version of *Fantastic Parodius*.
■ **8. Koitsu** - Another original *Parodius* creation. This one is simply a stick man riding a paper plane.
■ **9. Mambo** - Made specifically for *Parodius*, this robot fish is presumably a reference to Taito's *Gradius* competitor, *Darius*. The player two variant is a re-coloured sprite called Samba.
■ **10. Michael** - A pig with wings and a halo. A reference to the 'pigs might fly' lunacy of the series, perhaps?
■ **11. Mike** - Mike is a cat that appears only in the console-only *Chatting Parodius*.
■ **12. Option** - Only playable in *Sexy Parodius*, Option is, yes, the option power-up from *Gradius* but re-imagined as a playable character.



KONAMI CODE



13. Penta - Our favourite *Parodius* character appears in the first game, but is succeeded in sequels by his son, Pentarou.

14. Popolon - Popolon was the hero of the *Knightmare* trilogy on MSX. He only appears in the very first, MSX-exclusive *Parodius*, naturally.

15. Ran – Another cat character who appears alongside Mike in *Chatting Parodius*. We like the way he's always curled up.

16. Rupa - Appearing alongside his brother Upa in two *Parodius* games, this baby originates in the obscure *Bio Miracle Bokutte Upa* – a Japan-only Famicom shooter that has since been released in the West via Virtual Console.

17. Shooting Star -This *Gradius*-esque ship appears in *Sexy Parodius* with a player 2 alternative named Black Viper. It's a decent craft to use and worth trying out.

18. Sue - One of the many original chracters to be introduced in *Chatting Parodius*, Sue and her counterpart Memim are fairies that feature prominently on the game's box art.

19. Takosuke -The mascot of the *Parodius* series, Takosuke was the first character made for the series, and is based on the cartoon octopus seen outside Japanese seafood restaurants. He's gone on to be a fire favourite with fans.

20. Twinbee -This is the star of *Twinbee*, one of Konami's other great shooting game franchises from the Eighties. His, and counterpart Winbee's, silly nature makes the classic character perfect for the comedy of *Parodius*.

21. Vic Viper - As *Parodius* is a parody of *Gradius*, it makes sense for that game's iconic ship to feature. Vic Viper is the only playable chracter to feature in every *Parodius* game.

Bomberman

I NEED BOMBS, LOTS OF BOMBS

» RETROREVIVAL

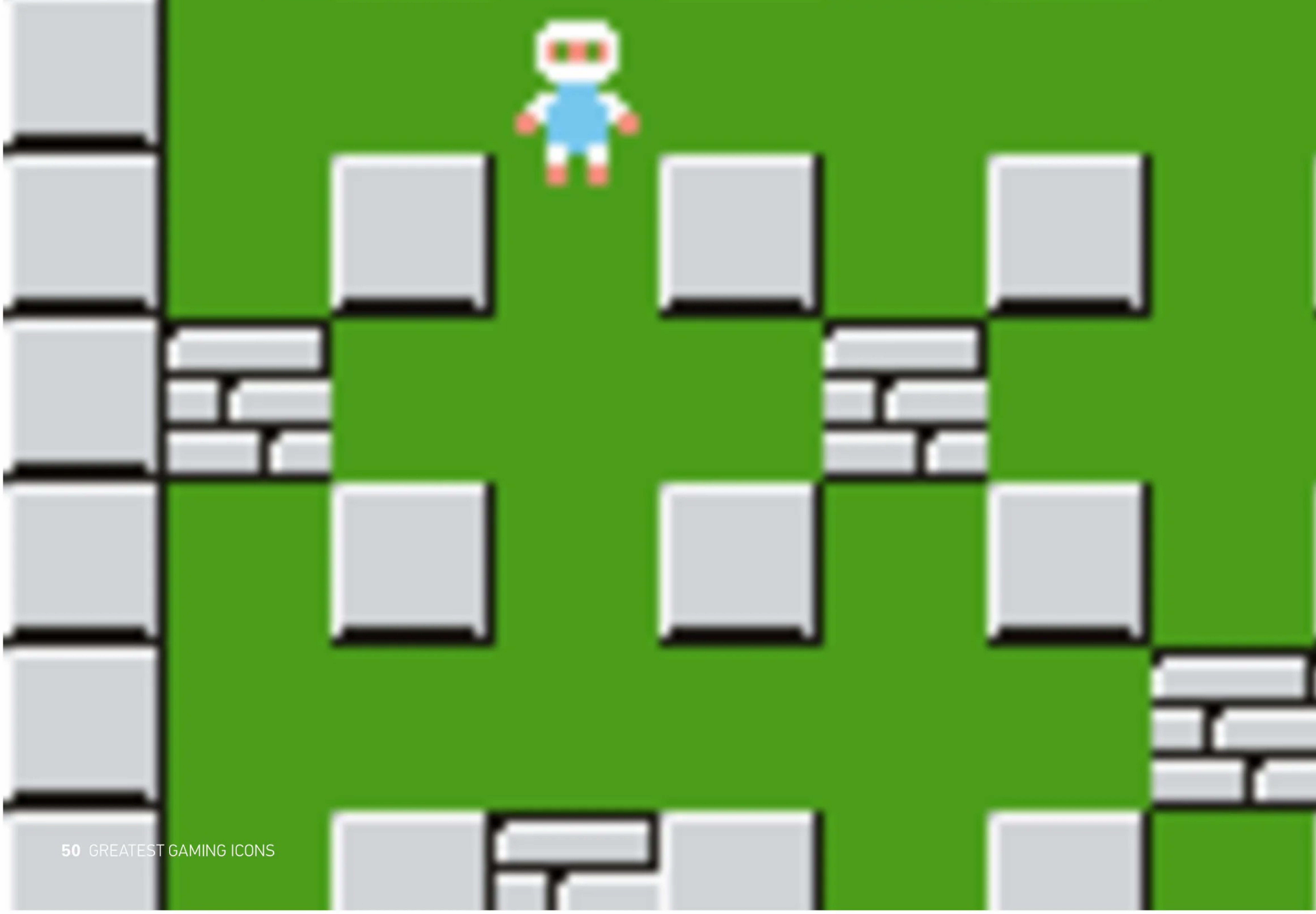
» FAMICOM » 1985 » HUDSON SOFT

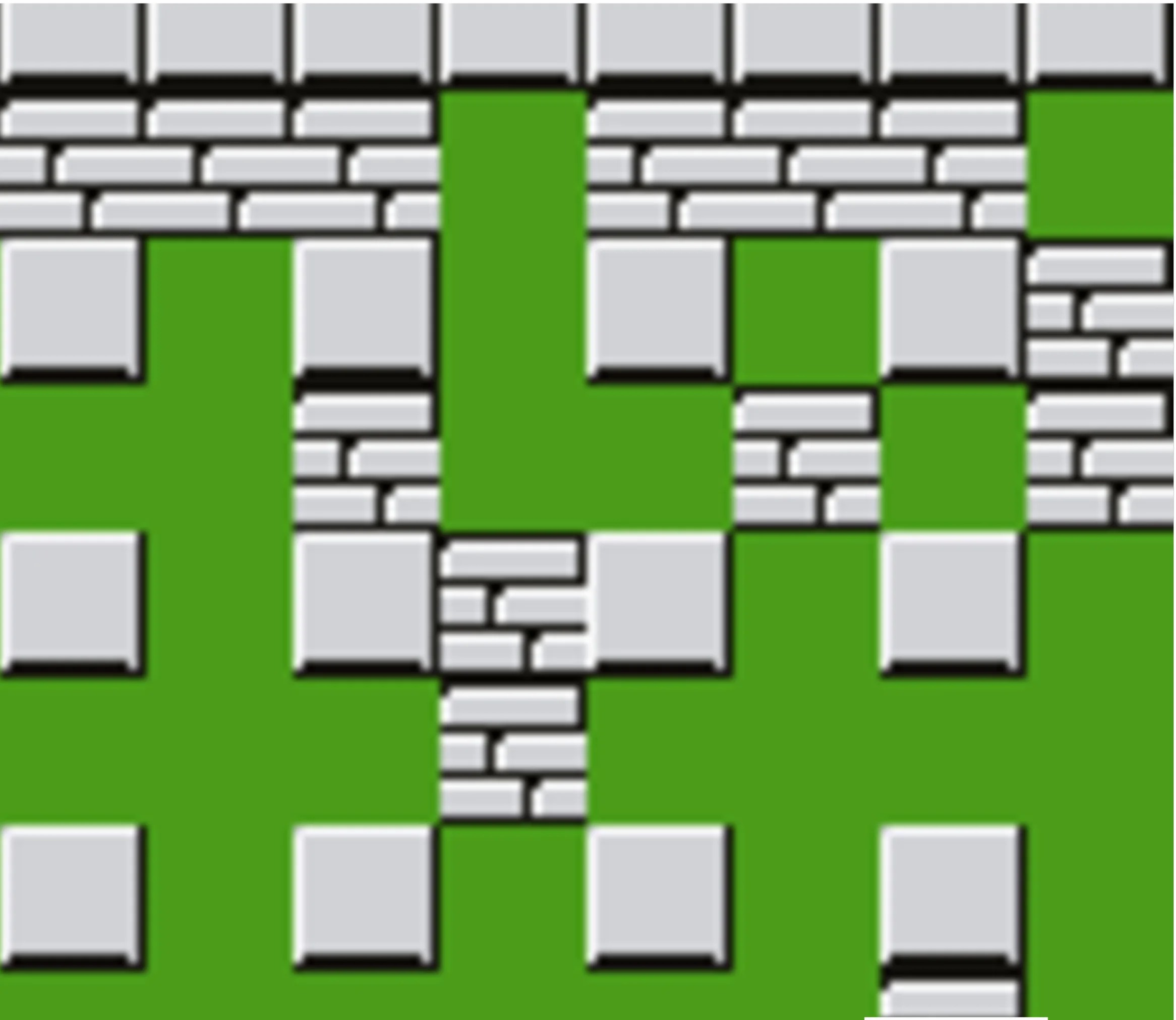
When I think of *Bomberman* I typically remember the ridiculously fun multiplayer games I used to have on my friend's Saturn, where up to six of us would all compete against each other. Admittedly, the game itself could cater for up to ten players, but my friend simply didn't know that many people and even if he did he didn't have enough pads to cater for all of them.

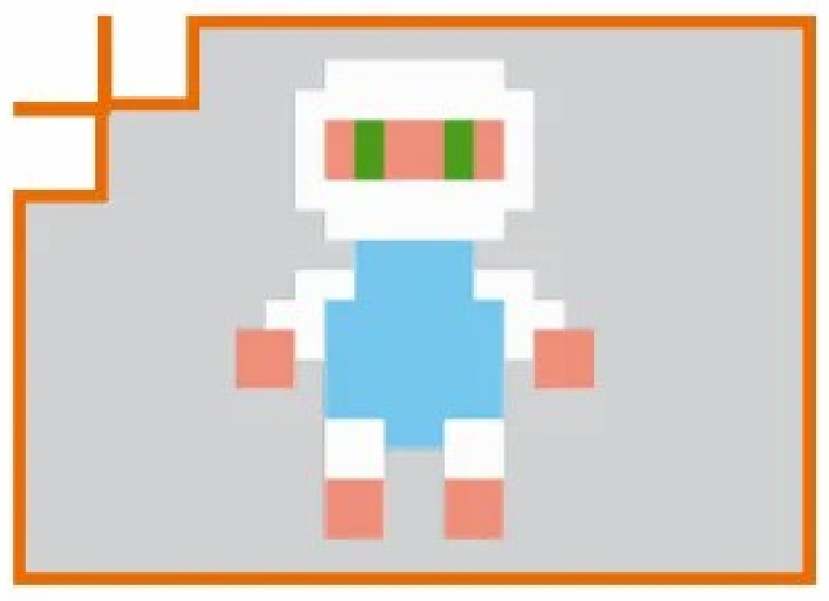
Of course a quick glance at this page should immediately highlight that this is not that game. There aren't nine other Bombermen running around the screen and letting off bombs, and the visuals look distinctively 8-bit. This is of course the NES game and we're focusing on it because while it wasn't the first game to sport the Bomberman name, it was the first to feature the lovable-looking Bomberman that we know today.

The first *Bomberman* was released for the MSX in 1983 and featured the exact same style of gameplay as the later NES game, but featured a little hat-wearing hero who dropped bombs everywhere. When Hudson Soft released *Bomberman* for the NES (oh right, the Famicom if we're being particular) the developer gave its star a brand-new back story and turned him into a cute-looking robot. He's not just any robot however, as this one dreams of becoming human and discovers that will in fact happen to him if he's able to escape the underground complex he lives in.

Now here's where stuff gets interesting (for me at least). When Bomberman gets to the end of the game he not only becomes human, but specifically turns into Lode Runner, which was another game that Hudson Soft had publishing rights to at the time, meaning that the publisher clearly retconned that game for its own purposes. So all in all Bomberman has faced something of an identity crisis over the years, but it's pleasing to see that he's rarely deviated from the variant that first appeared on the NES. Sorry, Famicom. ✱







ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** BOMBERMAN
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** BOMBERMAN
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER BOMBERMAN R
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SATURN BOMBERMAN
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** BLOWING THINGS UP

SABREMAN

The most intrepid adventurer of the Eighties and a great storyteller, Sabreman remains one of gaming's all-time favourite characters

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** SABREMAN
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** SABRE WULF
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SABRE WULF (2004)
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SABRE WULF
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** SWASHBUCKLING

Ultimate Play The Game is largely remembered as the team that became Rare, perhaps the UK's most prestigious videogame developer. The company brought us such gems as *GoldenEye*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, and *Perfect Dark* before being sold to Microsoft for a record breaking $377 million. 20 years prior to its acquisition by Microsoft, Ultimate Play The Game was a small company just beginning its battle for recognition. Founded by the Stamper Brothers, Carol Ward, and John Lathbury, Ultimate already had a dedicated workforce in its favour. The team's love for games produced an outpouring of brilliant games, but it was arguably the Sabreman series that brought the most to the industry.

The Sabreman story begins with a text introduction to offer meaning to the 256-screen maze through which Sabreman is about to embark. Akin to the narrative of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Sabreman introduces his story in ye olde English. And it's here that the majority of Sabreman's character comes to light – not just in the first game but also in the series as a whole. "I edge through the shady mounded clearing and on through the dense thickets of hot-house rainforest undergrowth," says Sabreman before we have even encountered him. The antiquated language style sets Sabreman himself as something of a grandad. Add to his age the fact that he is talking about the wilderness, of beasts and adventuring and he becomes a cross between Indiana Jones and David Attenborough.

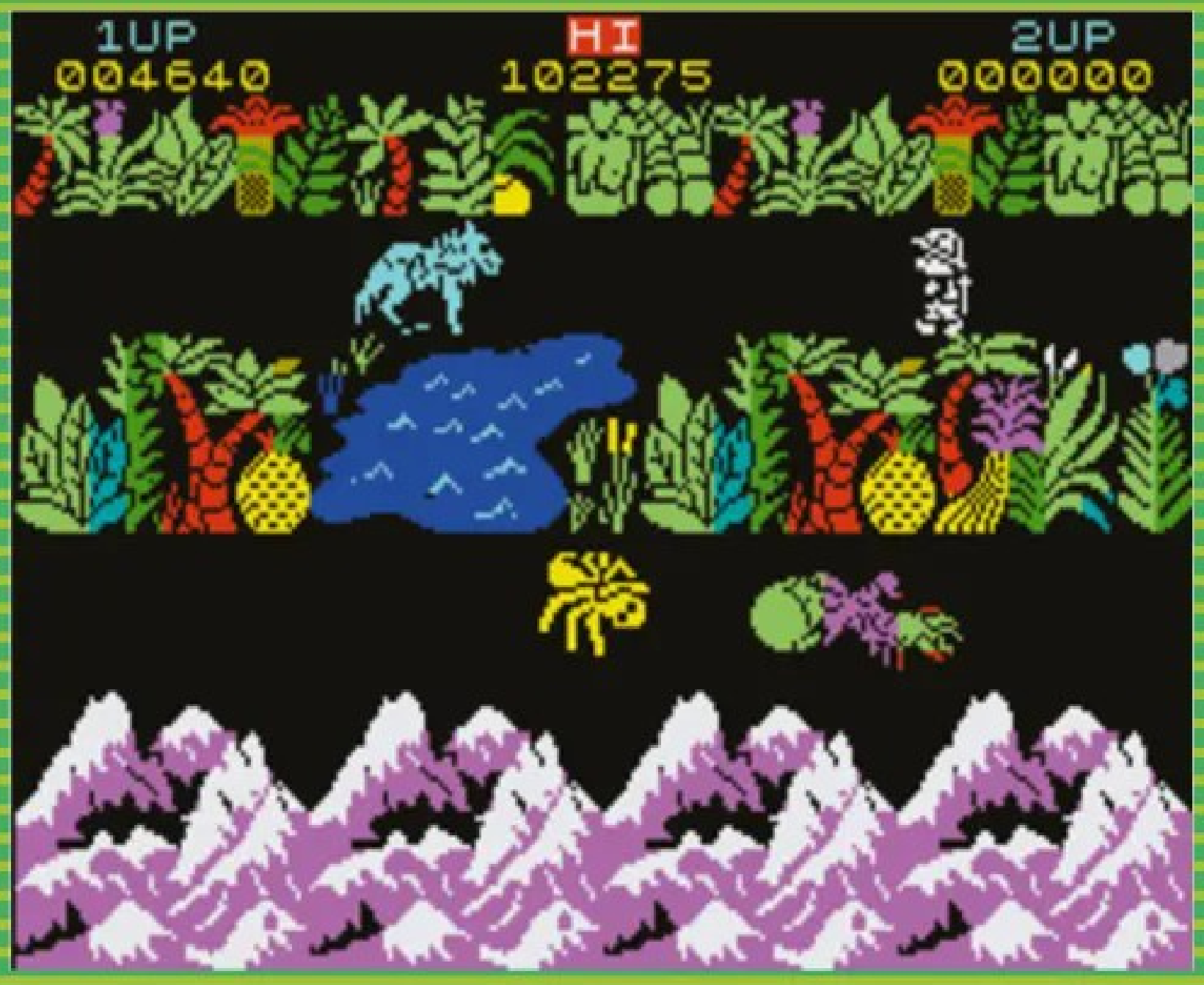
It's not only Sabreman's character that is portrayed primarily through text; so too is the objective of the game. "An amulet to seek thy will/Twas split by quad and hidden still/Pass the keeper wrought with hate/To gain an entrance to the gate," translates as "Collect four pieces of the amulet to get past the gatekeeper and out of the jungle." This objective is mirrored in Sabreman's next instalment: *Underwurlde*. "All you need is there to take/Locate the weapons, then to make/A journey on if you would dare/To find the devil in his lair." The notion, as seen here, of seeking out a precious object to overcome an obstacle, is one of the most fundamental story genres. The three weapons that Sabreman must find to defeat the bosses at each of the game's three endings are no different in essence to the fleece that Jason must bring to Pelius in Jason and the Golden Fleece, or even the Holy Grail. Here the trial is that of the underworld – itself an idea and image as old as the art of storytelling.

"Long dark paths have I travelled/Through caverns and hidden Labyrinths/My path grown darker," so notes Sabreman at the beginning of Underwurlde. Thankfully, our hero has suddenly leapt from the David Attenborough Wellington boots of *Sabre Wulf* into the more agile shoes of a gymnast. Throughout the 2D platform levels of *Underwurlde*, Sabreman jumps, shoots, spins, and swings from ropes. If he was previously an ageing Indiana Jones, he is now an Indy after intense military training – a necessary transition given that *Underwurlde* is notorious for its frustratingly difficult platforming and ceaseless enemies. Each of the three exits to the Underwurlde lead Sabreman to one of the next three instalments of the series: *Knight Lore*, *Pentagram*, and the unreleased *Mire Mare*. In *Pentagram* he has begun to learn the art of wizardry and must find yet another precious object. Then, in *Knight Lore* Sabreman must find the wizard who will cure him of his curse to forever be a werewolf.

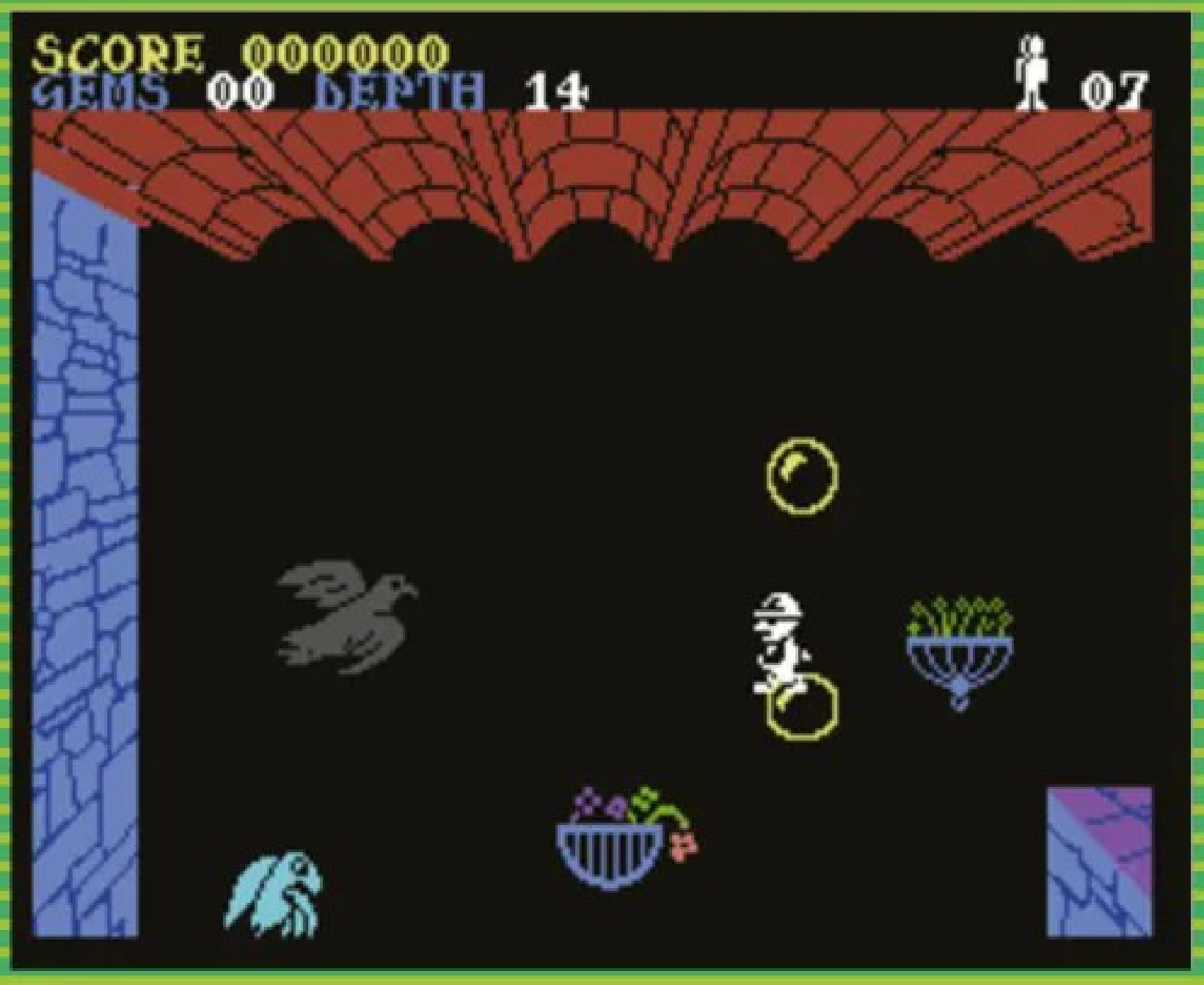
The choice to put story over game, or vice versa, is one of the most fundamental meditations in game design. In the Sabreman series, Ultimate provides one of the most poignant illustrations of putting game ahead of story. In its continual stream of innovative games, it has all but covered a glossary of storytelling's most archetypal themes: wizardry, adventure, sacred objects, the underworld, werewolves, and even Indiana Jones. In contrast, modern games will often archetype gameplay and use story and character as their primary marketing key. Though there is no right or wrong answer to the question of gameplay versus story, Sabreman's success certainly speaks for itself. By focusing on the gameplay, the story of Sabreman might have easily become overblown and unrealistic, but instead it allowed Ultimate to produce a series with continually excellent gameplay, and with it one of the Spectrum's greatest games. ✱

> **"One of the most poignant illustrations of putting game ahead of story"**

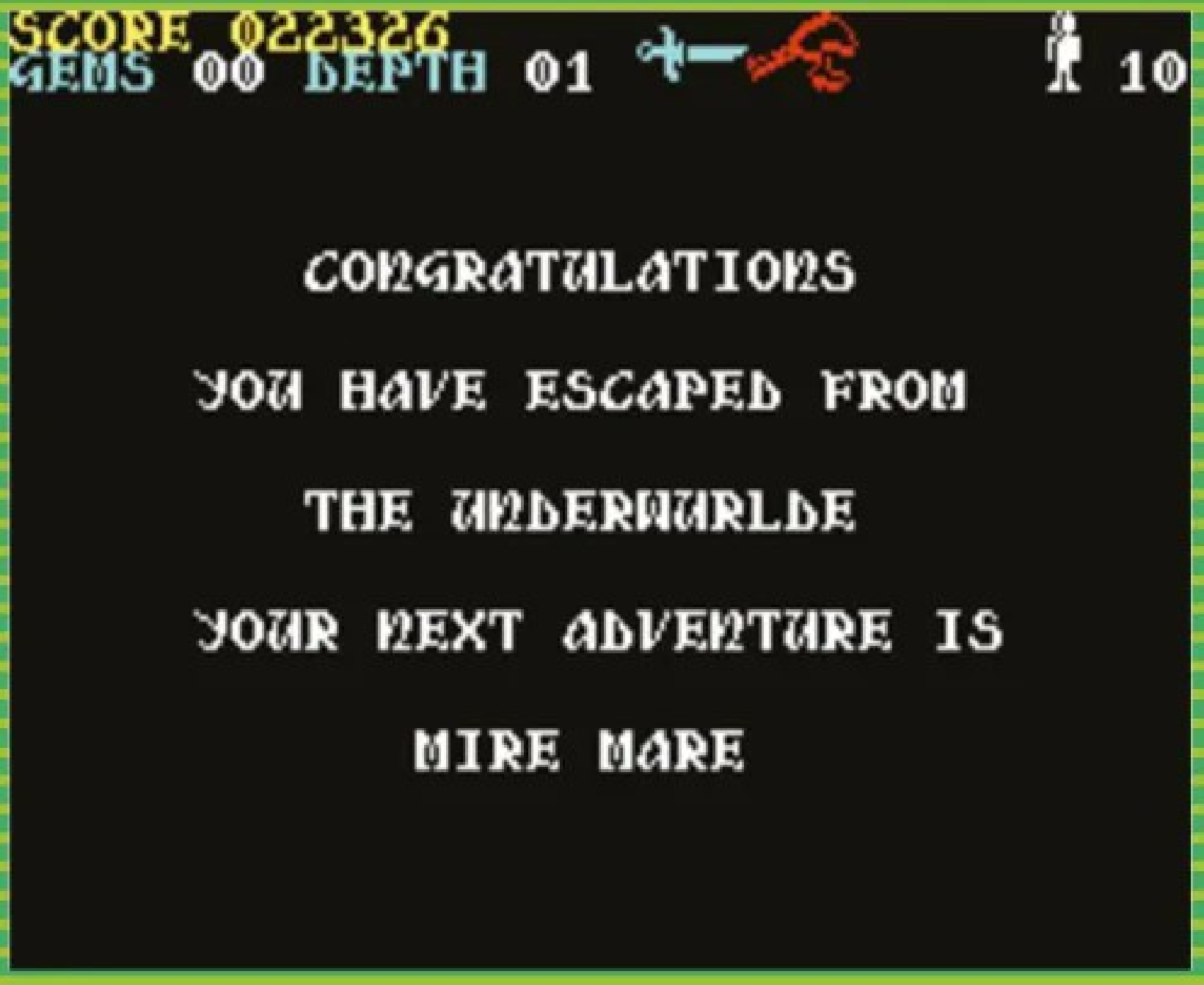
> MAGIC MOMENTS



■ Sabreman meets the titular wolf in his first outing, *Sabre Wulf*.

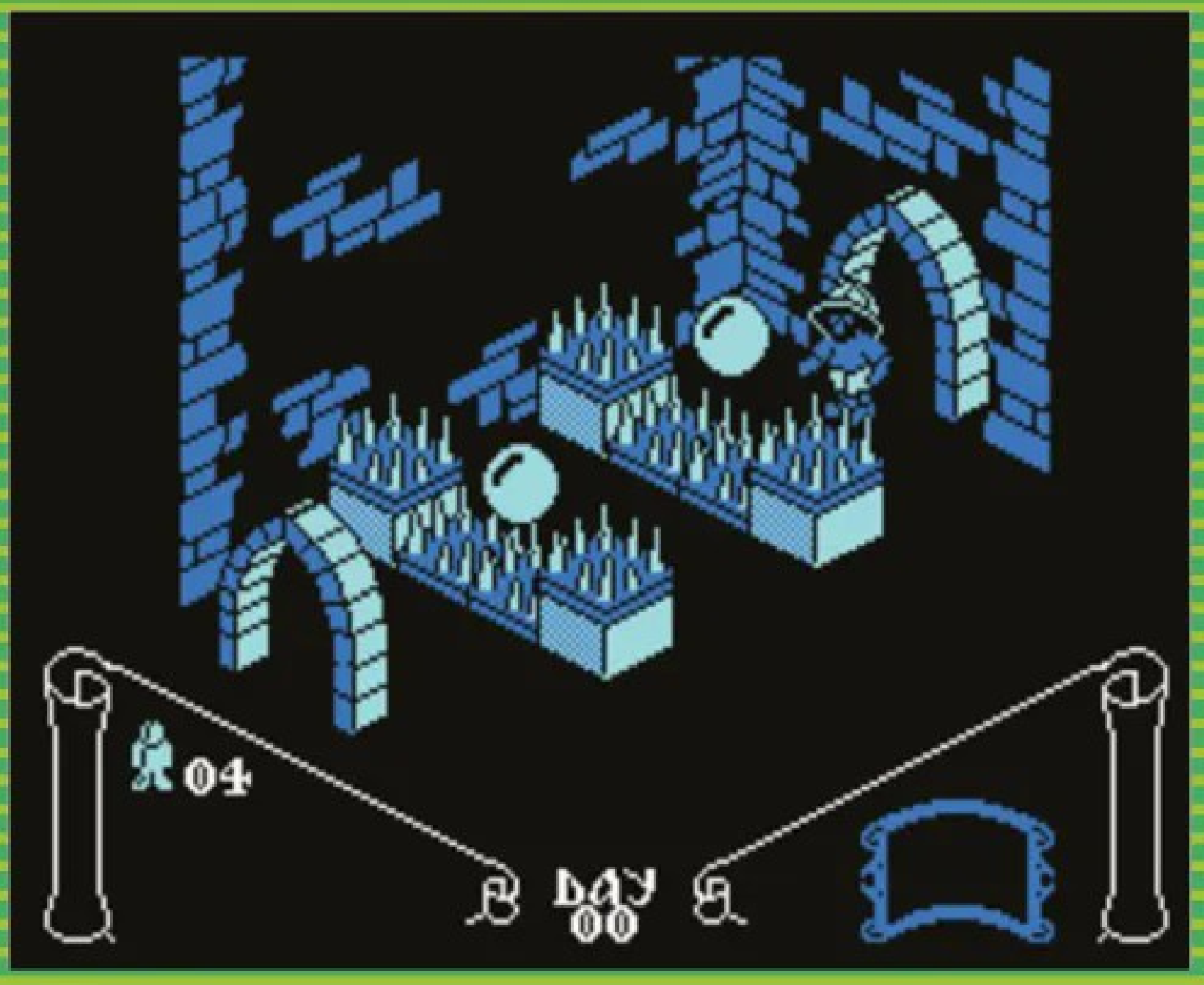


■ Sabreman acquired many more moves to help him pass through the *Underwulde*.

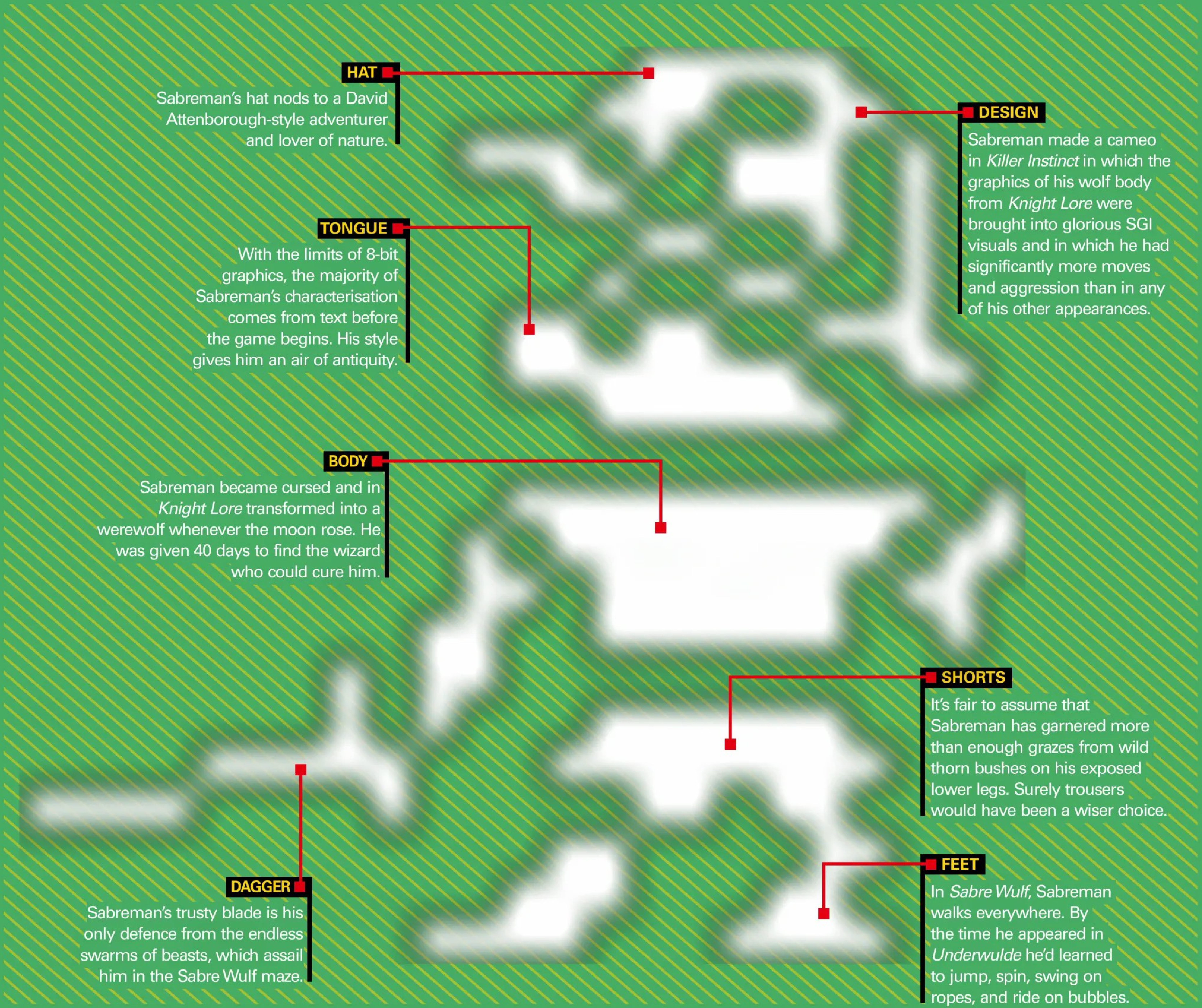


CONGRATULATIONS
YOU HAVE ESCAPED FROM
THE UNDERWURLDE
YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE IS
MIRE MARE

■ *Underwulde* featured three exits, each of which led Sabreman to his next adventure.



■ *Knight Lore* is widely considered one of the best three games on the Spectrum.



HAT
Sabreman's hat nods to a David Attenborough-style adventurer and lover of nature.

TONGUE
With the limits of 8-bit graphics, the majority of Sabreman's characterisation comes from text before the game begins. His style gives him an air of antiquity.

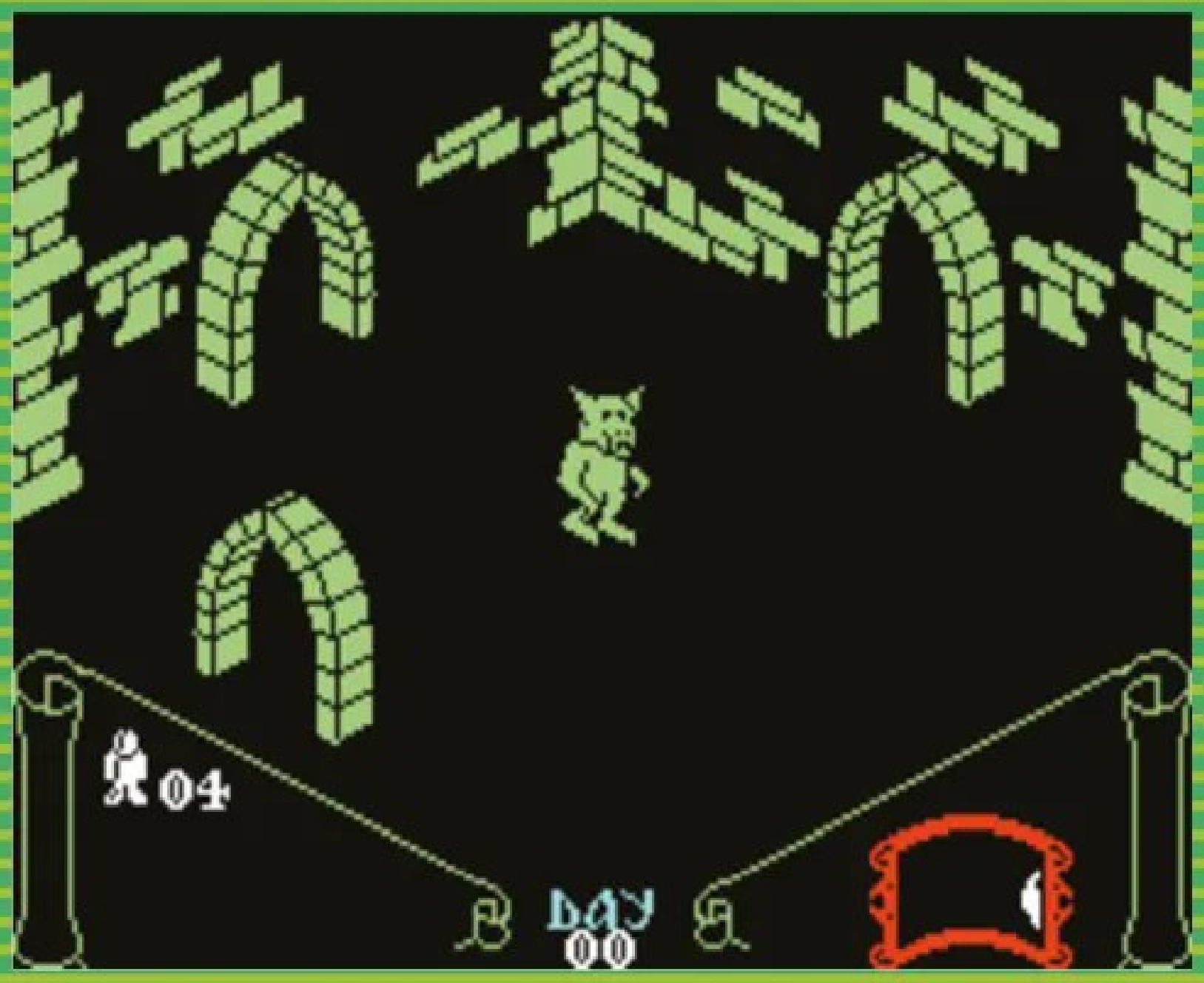
BODY
Sabreman became cursed and in *Knight Lore* transformed into a werewolf whenever the moon rose. He was given 40 days to find the wizard who could cure him.

DAGGER
Sabreman's trusty blade is his only defence from the endless swarms of beasts, which assail him in the Sabre Wulf maze.

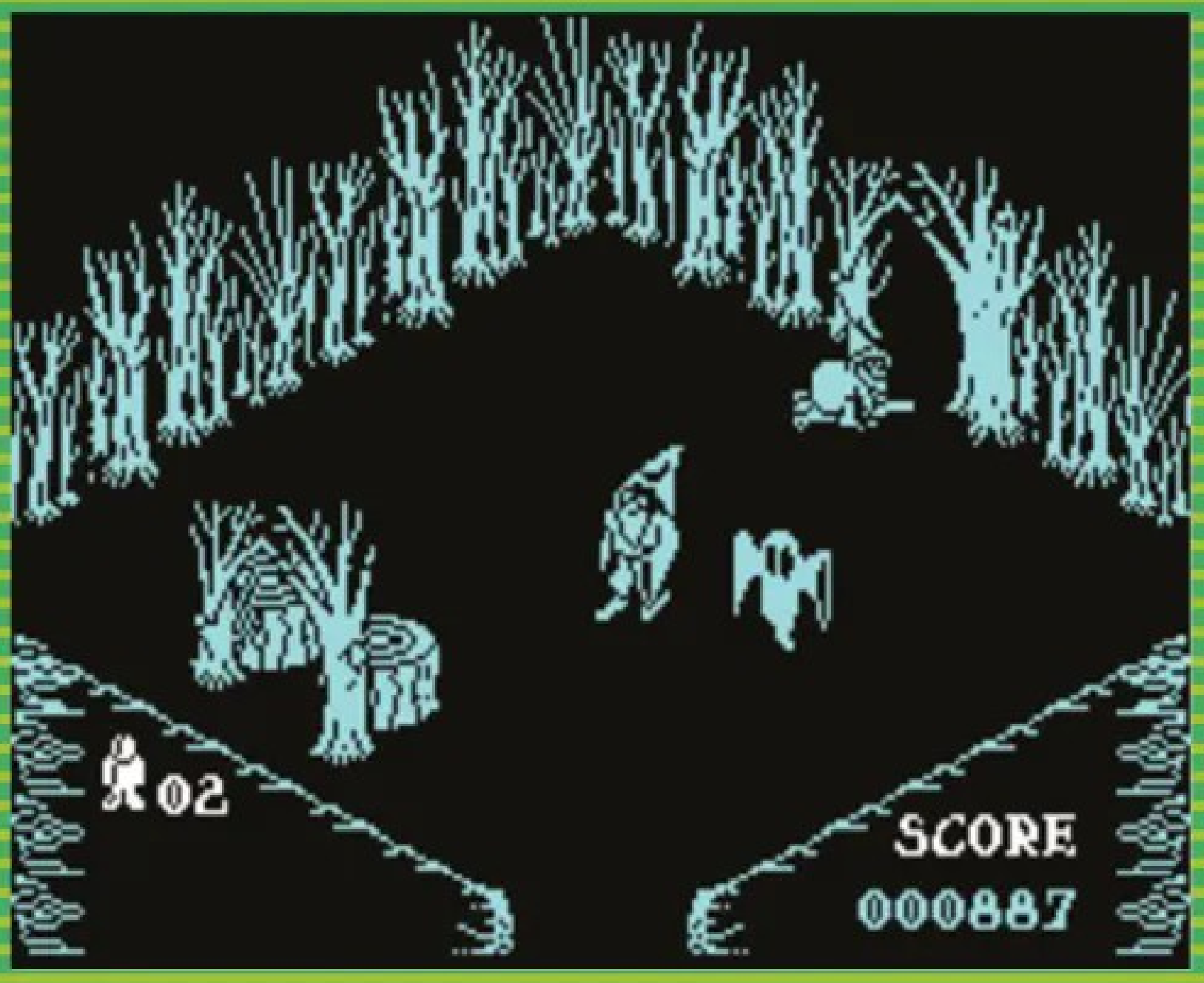
DESIGN
Sabreman made a cameo in *Killer Instinct* in which the graphics of his wolf body from *Knight Lore* were brought into glorious SGI visuals and in which he had significantly more moves and aggression than in any of his other appearances.

SHORTS
It's fair to assume that Sabreman has garnered more than enough grazes from wild thorn bushes on his exposed lower legs. Surely trousers would have been a wiser choice.

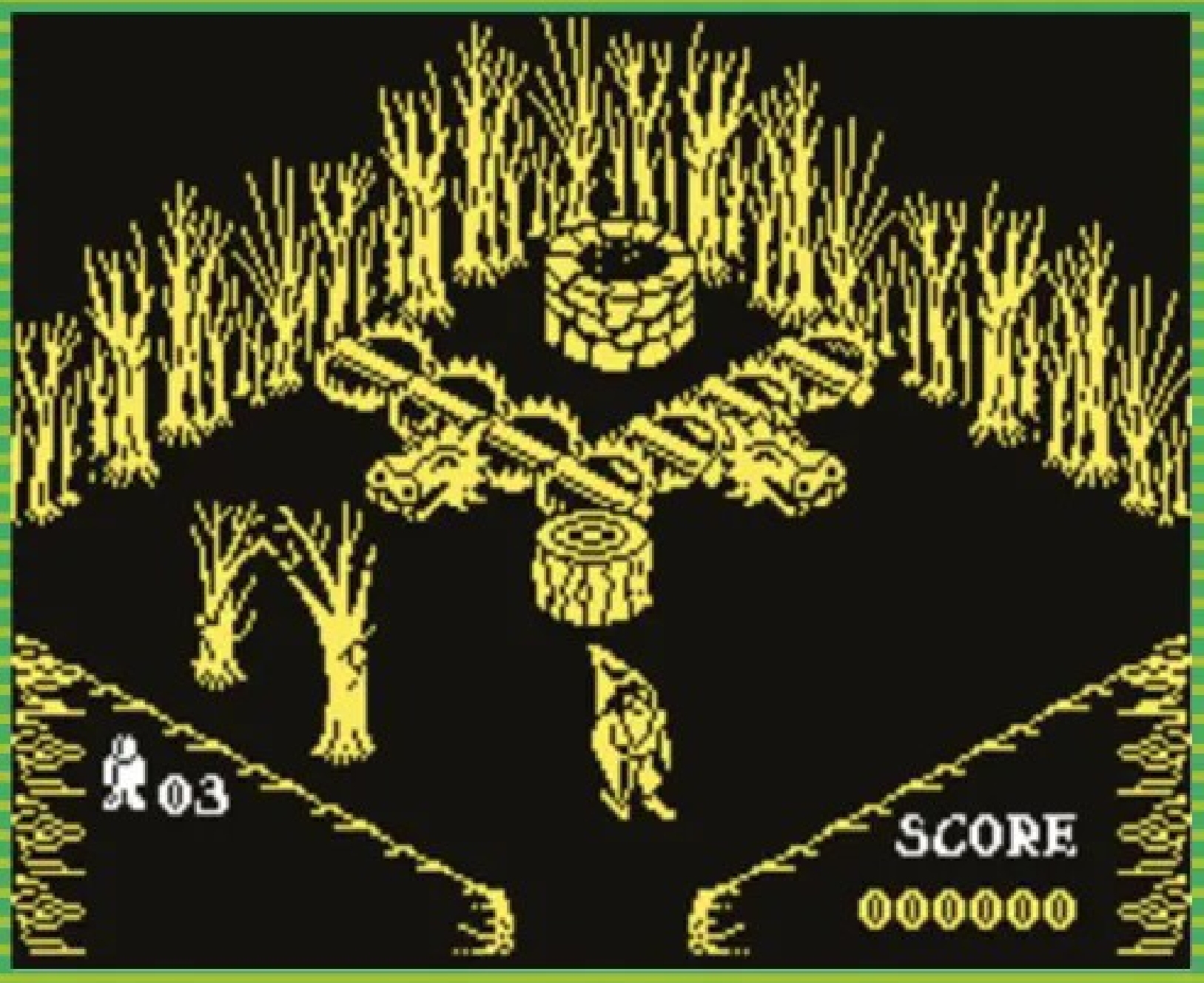
FEET
In *Sabre Wulf*, Sabreman walks everywhere. By the time he appeared in *Underwulde* he'd learned to jump, spin, swing on ropes, and ride on bubbles.



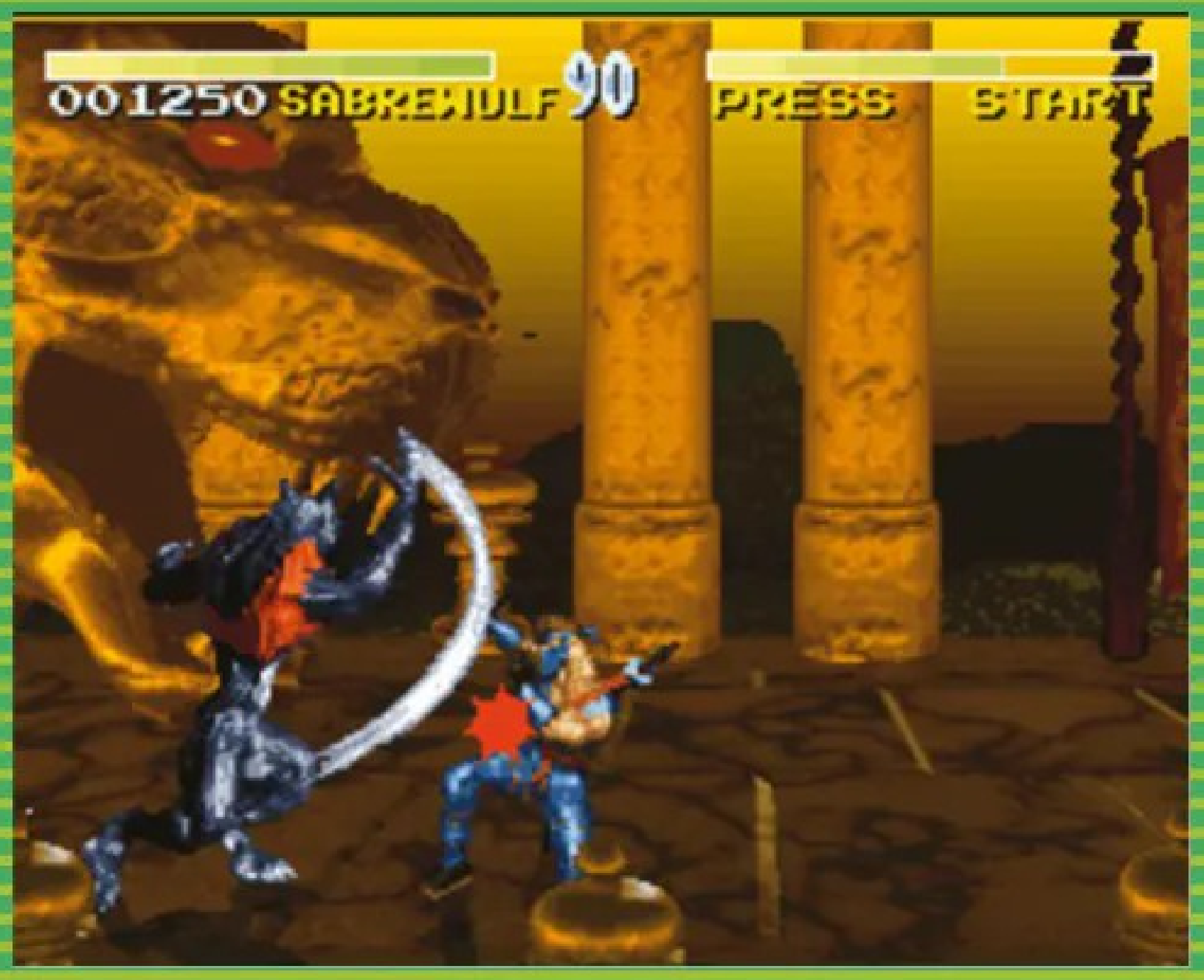
■ When the moon is up, Sabreman transforms, with comical effect, to the wolf.



■ A newly qualified wizard, Sabreman seeks out the titular artefact in *Pentagram*.



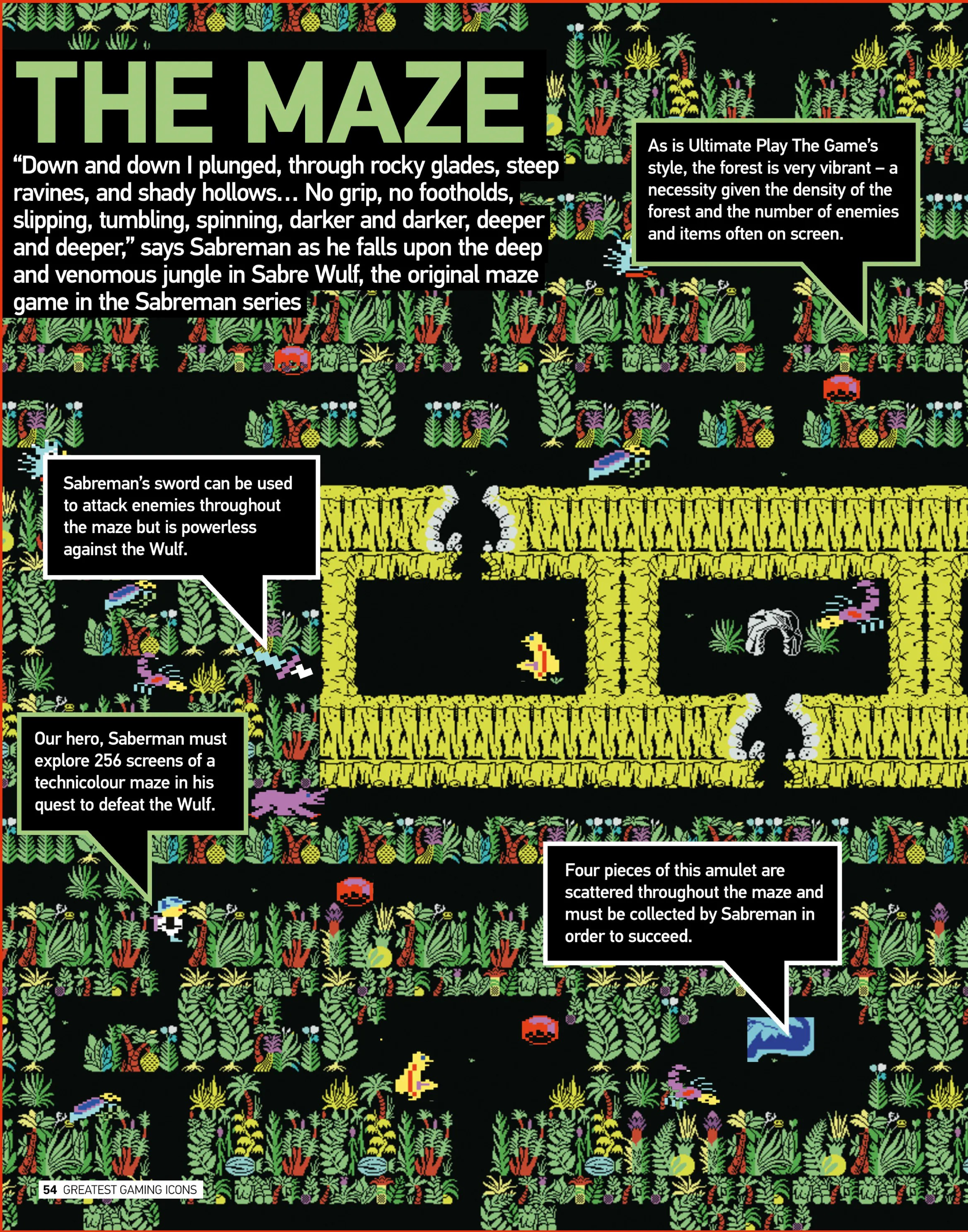
■ Sabreman makes it to the Slippery Waters in *Pentagram*.



■ Sinking his teeth in. Sabreman in wolf form in *Killer Instinct*.

THE MAZE

"Down and down I plunged, through rocky glades, steep ravines, and shady hollows… No grip, no footholds, slipping, tumbling, spinning, darker and darker, deeper and deeper," says Sabreman as he falls upon the deep and venomous jungle in Sabre Wulf, the original maze game in the Sabreman series

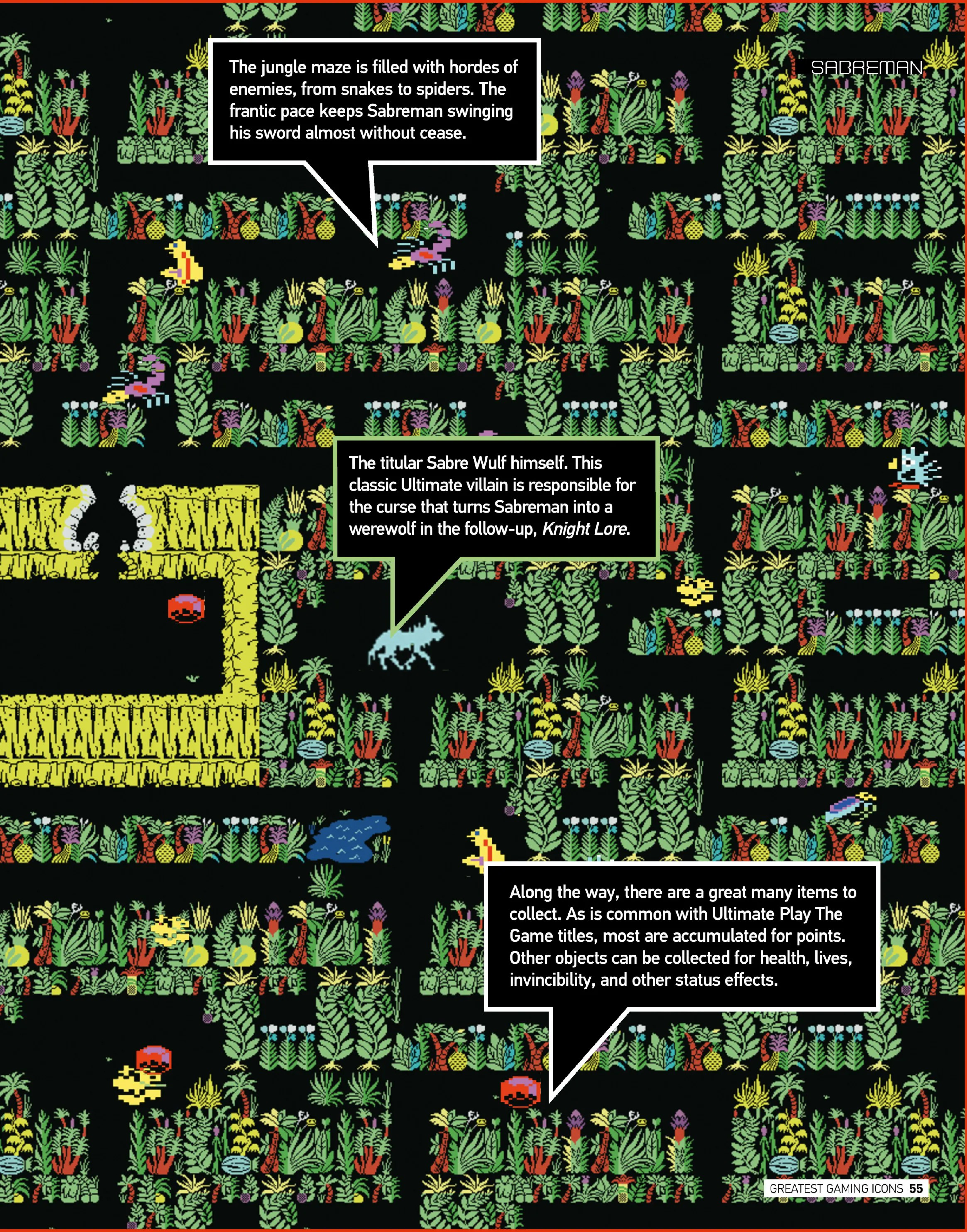


As is Ultimate Play The Game's style, the forest is very vibrant – a necessity given the density of the forest and the number of enemies and items often on screen.

Sabreman's sword can be used to attack enemies throughout the maze but is powerless against the Wulf.

Our hero, Saberman must explore 256 screens of a technicolour maze in his quest to defeat the Wulf.

Four pieces of this amulet are scattered throughout the maze and must be collected by Sabreman in order to succeed.



The jungle maze is filled with hordes of enemies, from snakes to spiders. The frantic pace keeps Sabreman swinging his sword almost without cease.

The titular Sabre Wulf himself. This classic Ultimate villain is responsible for the curse that turns Sabreman into a werewolf in the follow-up, *Knight Lore*.

Along the way, there are a great many items to collect. As is common with Ultimate Play The Game titles, most are accumulated for points. Other objects can be collected for health, lives, invincibility, and other status effects.

MONTY MOLE

Politics and small woodland rodents are a curious combination. Try telling Monty Mole that. You'll need to catch him first…

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** MONTY MOLE
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** WANTED! MONTY MOLE
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** IMPOSSAMOLE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** MONTY ON THE RUN
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** UPSETTING MINERS

If you were asked to come up with a new videogame hero and you pitched Monty Mole today, you'd likely be thrown from a developer's roof quicker than you can scream 'it was just an idea'. It's also likely that the judge and your family, after hearing how you planned to risk millions of pounds on a platform game with subtle political leanings, would turn a blind eye to the whole debacle out of embarrassment. It may come as a surprise, but a game with such a backdrop was a huge hit in the Eighties, in a time when, like today, Britain's economy was taking a bit of a battering. Unemployment was high and the country's miners were among those hit hardest. It was a bleak situation, and one that culminated with the notorious miners' strikes of 1984-1985. Peter Harrap was the brain behind *Monty Mole*. Harrap, the son of a mine safety officer, grew up in Yorkshire, a place with a large mining community heavily affected by the strikes. But despite the gloomy setting, it was here Harrap found the inspiration for one of the most popular British platform heroes of all time.

Wanted! Monty Mole tells the surreal tale of a tubby mole who is trying to snatch coal from his local mine shaft to keep warm during a particularly austere winter. Once the furry thief had secured his valuable black nuggets, the game's final screen found our hero exiting the mines through the confines of 'Arthur's Castle', a vague play on the sound of 'Arthur Scargill'. It's here Monty discovers the perfect opportunity to seize the ballot papers and vote-casting scroll to bring down the big man's plans. As a result, *Wanted! Monty Mole* caused controversy in the tabloids and press when it was released – especially as the game's end-of-level boss bore more than a passing resemblance to a certain leader of the miner's union.

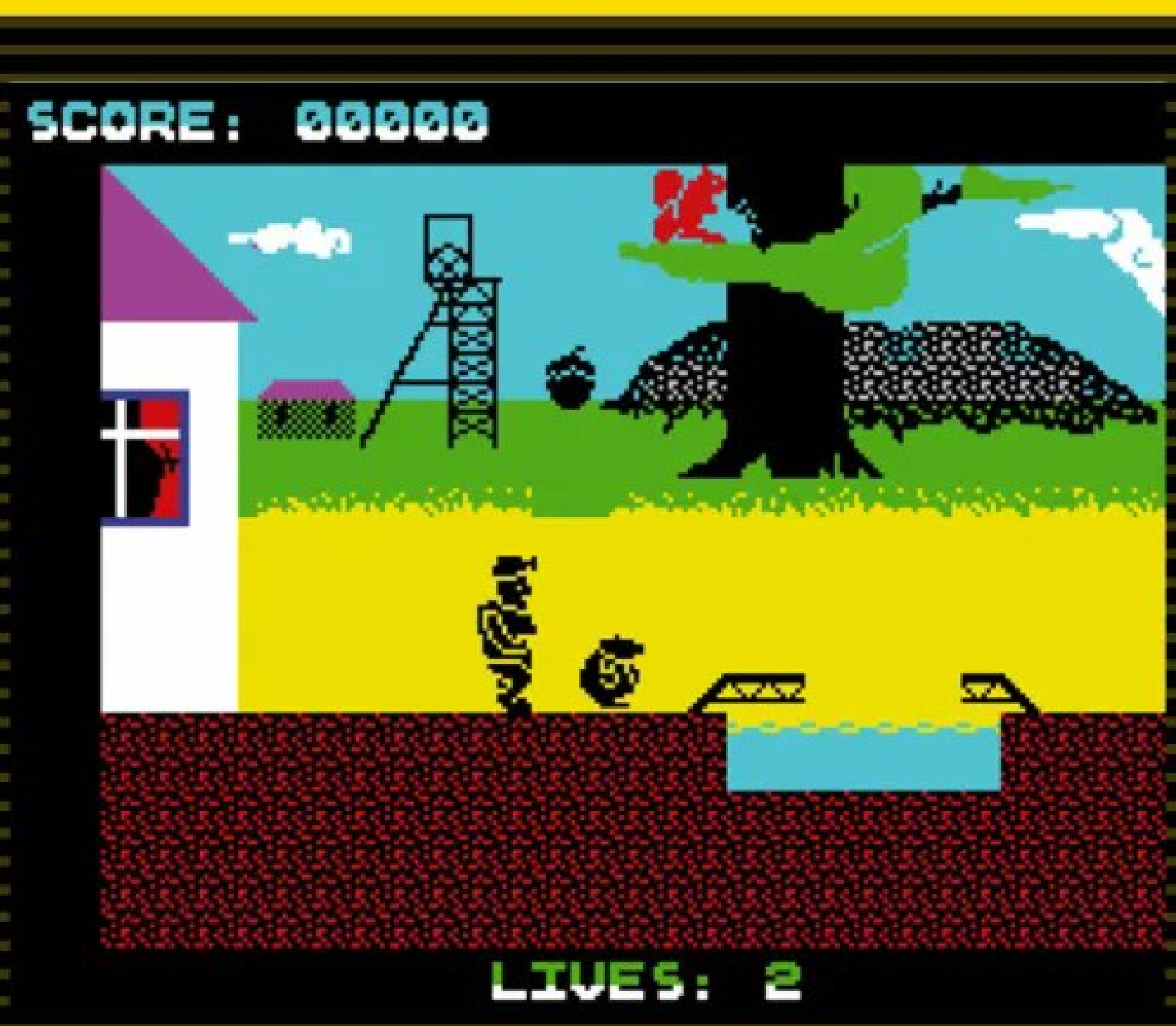
But Monty Mole's humorous exploits didn't end there. After the events of *Wanted! Monty Mole* poor Monty is thrown in Scudmore clink and forced to rub cells with murderers, deviants and fellow coal bandits. Luckily, his rescue is plotted by his best pal and professional safebreaker, Sam Stoat, in the game *Monty Is Innocent*. The game wasn't written by Harrap and its gameplay saw a change in *Wanted*'s jump-and-collect formula. And Monty didn't even appear until the end of the game, which is why it is viewed as a soft sequel by many fans. The third title, *Monty On The Run*, found Monty back in the hands of Harrap, appearing in another classic platform caper detailing Monty's efforts to abscond after being sprung from prison. The final Monty game to be written by Harrap, *Auf Wiedersehen Monty*, saw the popular fugitive resorting to the bad tricks he picked up in jail to steal enough swag to buy a Greek island and escape the unwavering arm of the law forever.

Sadly, the concluding game in the franchise put a commercial-feeling full stop on the series. As the platform genre was steering toward a more dash-and-action style of gameplay – popularised by games like *Super Mario Bros* and *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* – Monty was given a new look by his developer Gremlin Graphics and transformed into a gun-toting superhero. *Impossimole* shared little semblance to the preceding Monty titles, and as Harrap had left the company before the game went into development, it also lacked his biting satire.

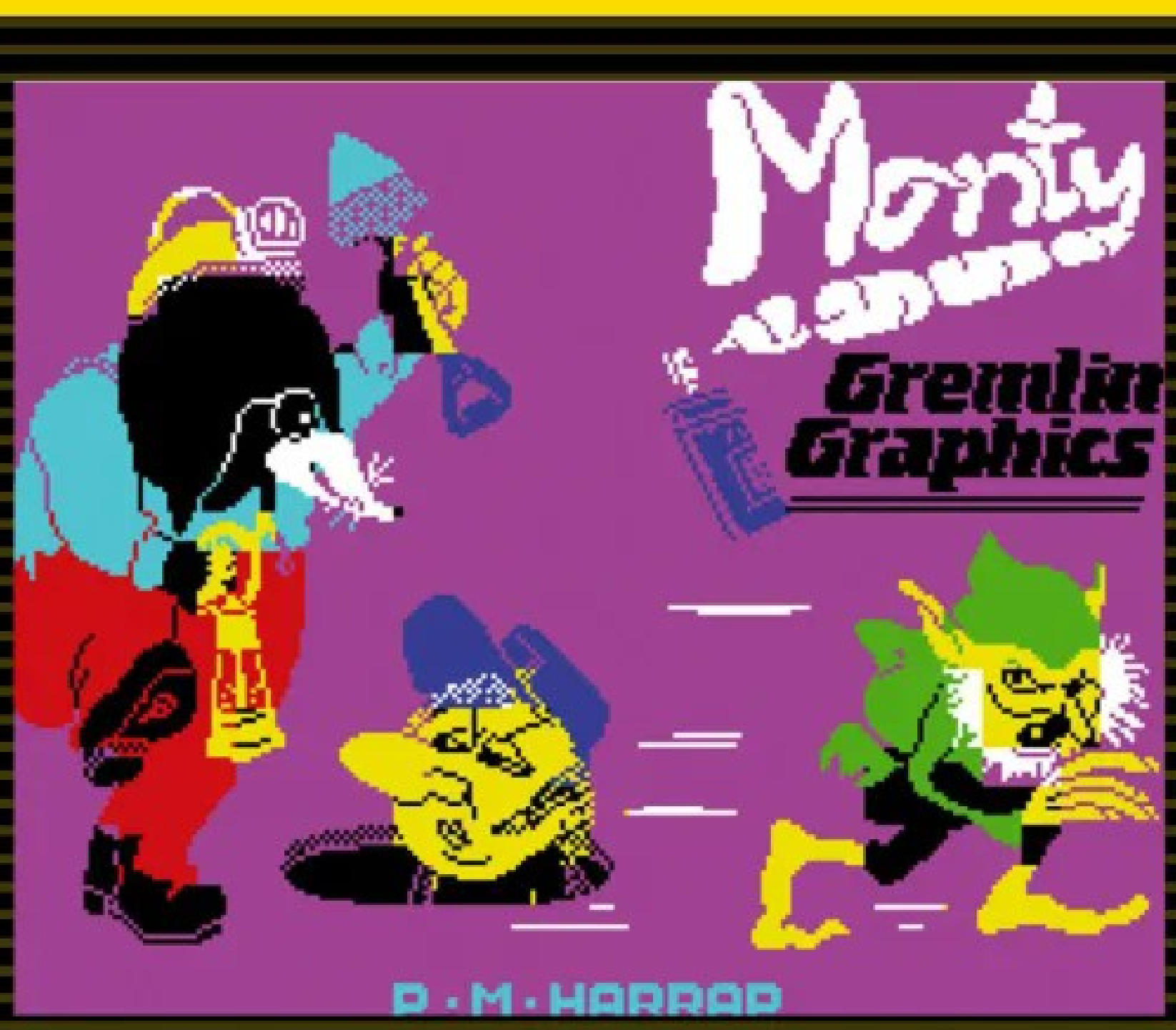
> **"Monty shares a great many parallels with Surbiton's prospector Miner Willy"**

Astute readers may remember that we've already featured another 8-bit platform game hero spreading a wonderful little political message across Thatcher's Britain in this book. It's clear that Monty shares a great many parallels with Surbiton's famous pint-sized prospector Miner Willy. From their cartoon and colourful aesthetics to the sublimely chipper music and wonderful injection of lampoon, there's a stark feeling that Monty was heavily inspired by Matt Smith's creation. Similarly, like Willy, Monty is another excellent example of that strong, often overlooked bond between creator and creation in those early days of game design. ✱

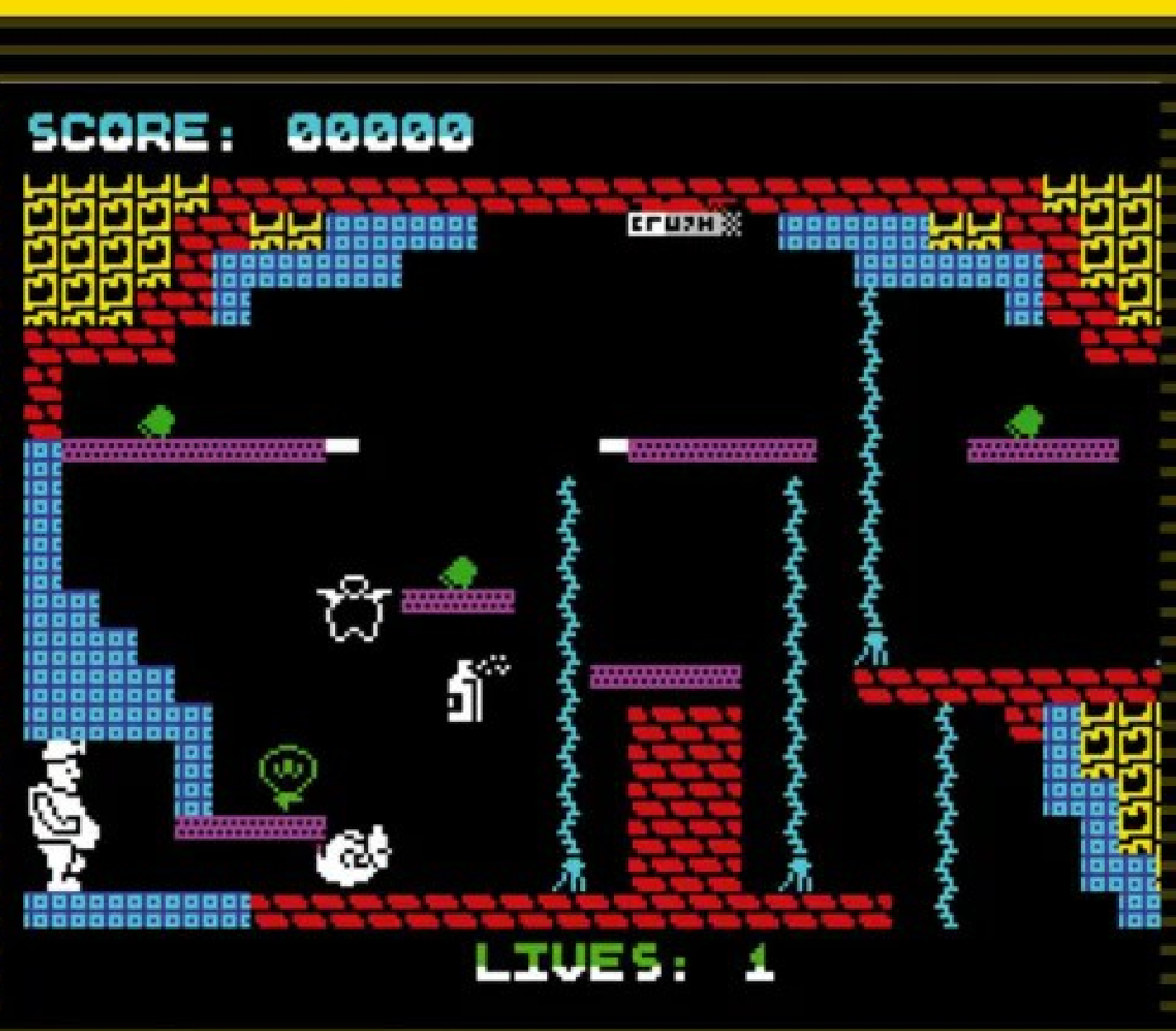
> MAGIC MOMENTS



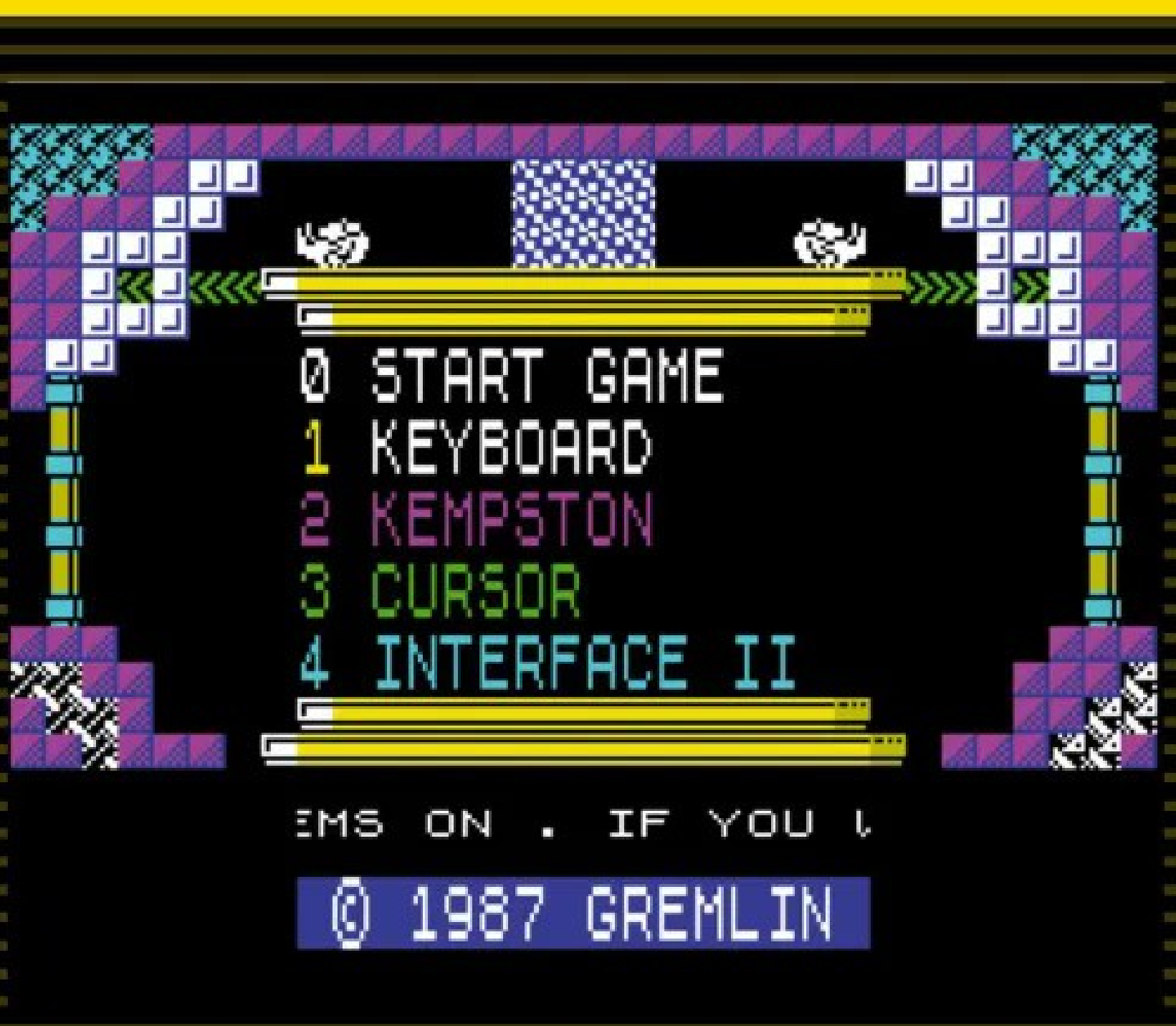
■ Monty picks up his coal bucket and disturbs a peeved miner in the process.



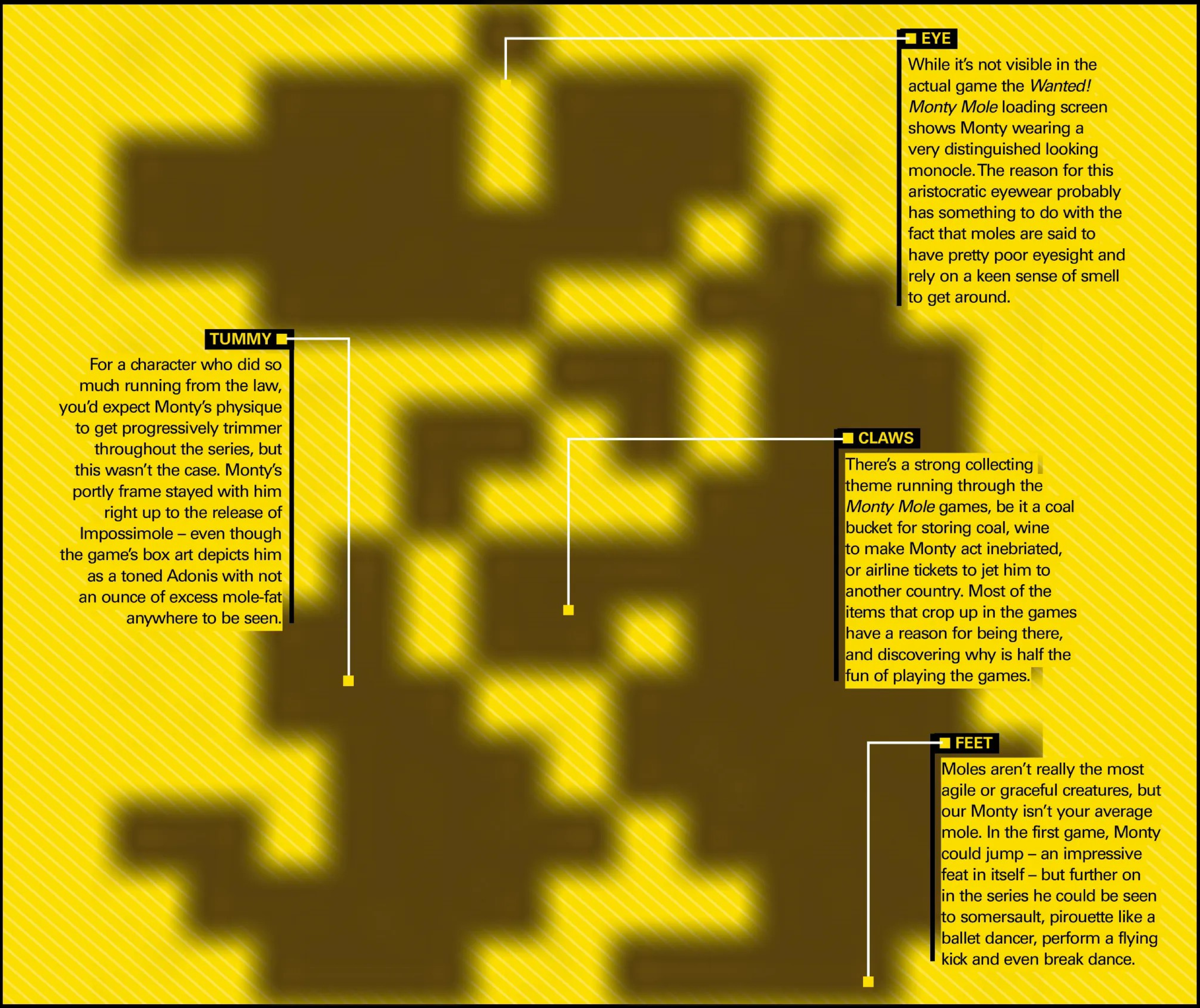
■ Monty's cheeky loading screen features a caricature of a certain Arthur Scargill.



■ Monty snuffs it and his spirit is seen rising up to the heavens.



■ Leave the *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* menu screen running and the Montys start dancing.



EYE

While it's not visible in the actual game the *Wanted! Monty Mole* loading screen shows Monty wearing a very distinguished looking monocle. The reason for this aristocratic eyewear probably has something to do with the fact that moles are said to have pretty poor eyesight and rely on a keen sense of smell to get around.

TUMMY

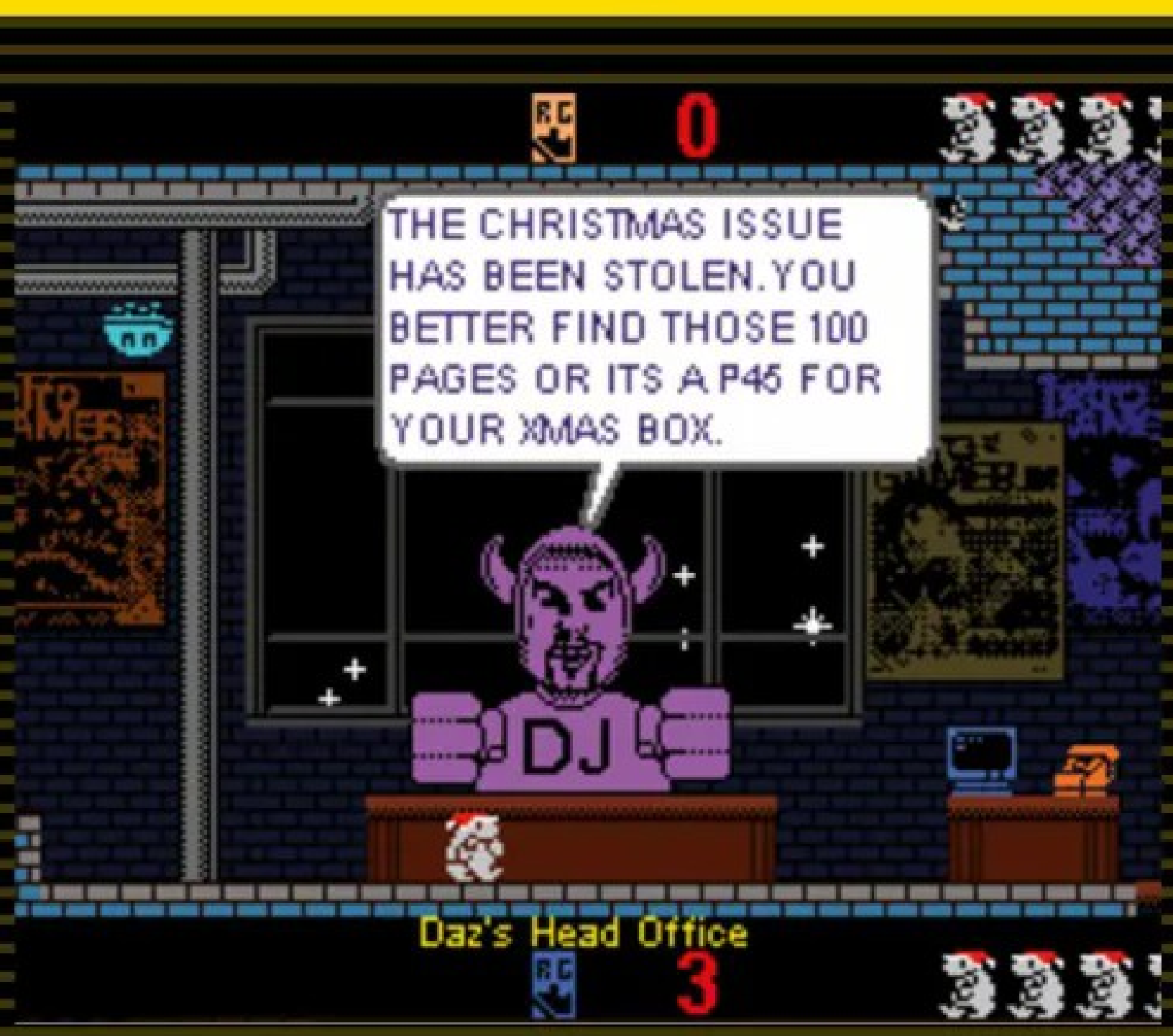
For a character who did so much running from the law, you'd expect Monty's physique to get progressively trimmer throughout the series, but this wasn't the case. Monty's portly frame stayed with him right up to the release of Impossimole – even though the game's box art depicts him as a toned Adonis with not an ounce of excess mole-fat anywhere to be seen.

CLAWS

There's a strong collecting theme running through the *Monty Mole* games, be it a coal bucket for storing coal, wine to make Monty act inebriated, or airline tickets to jet him to another country. Most of the items that crop up in the games have a reason for being there, and discovering why is half the fun of playing the games.

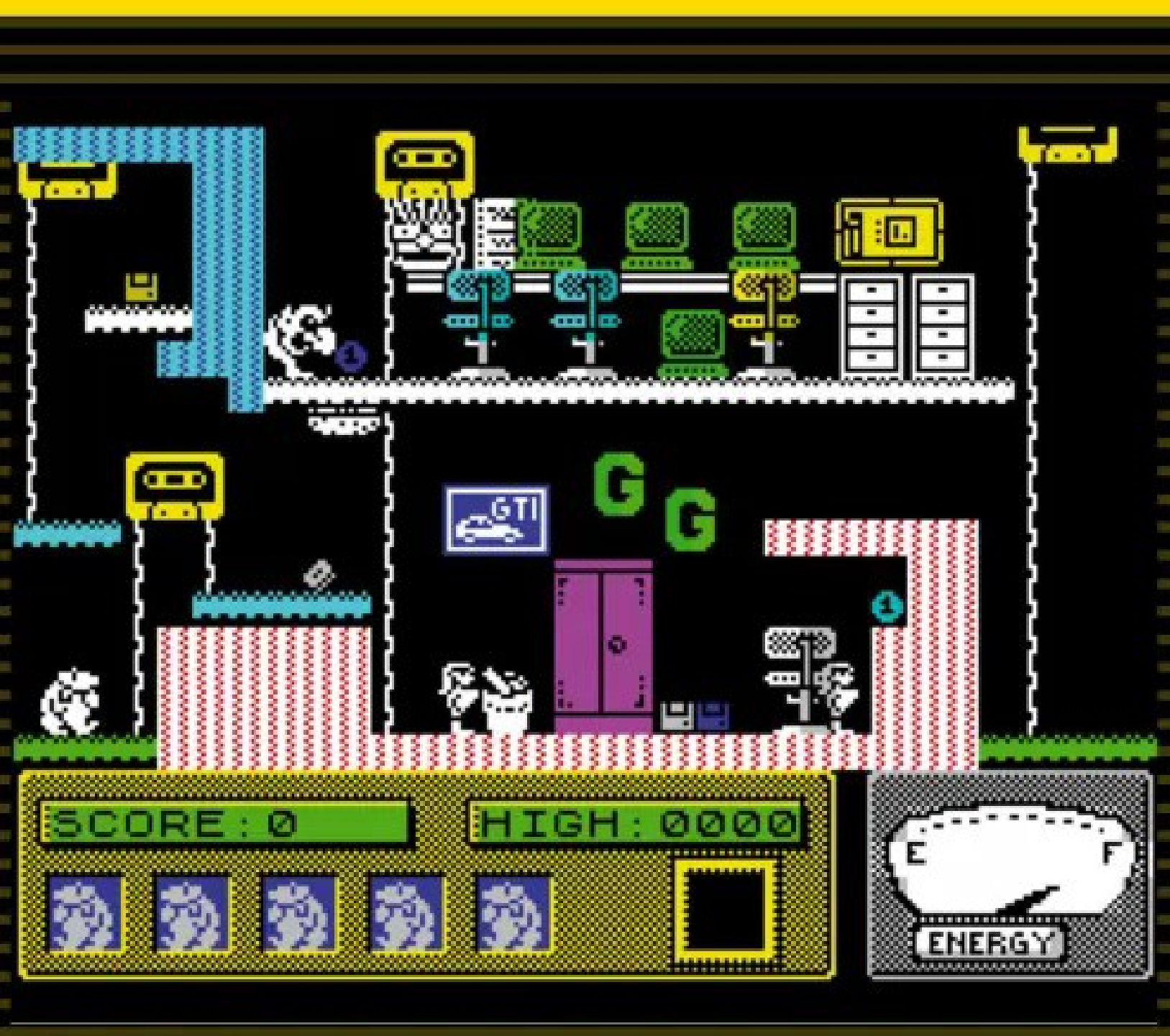
FEET

Moles aren't really the most agile or graceful creatures, but our Monty isn't your average mole. In the first game, Monty could jump – an impressive feat in itself – but further on in the series he could be seen to somersault, pirouette like a ballet dancer, perform a flying kick and even break dance.

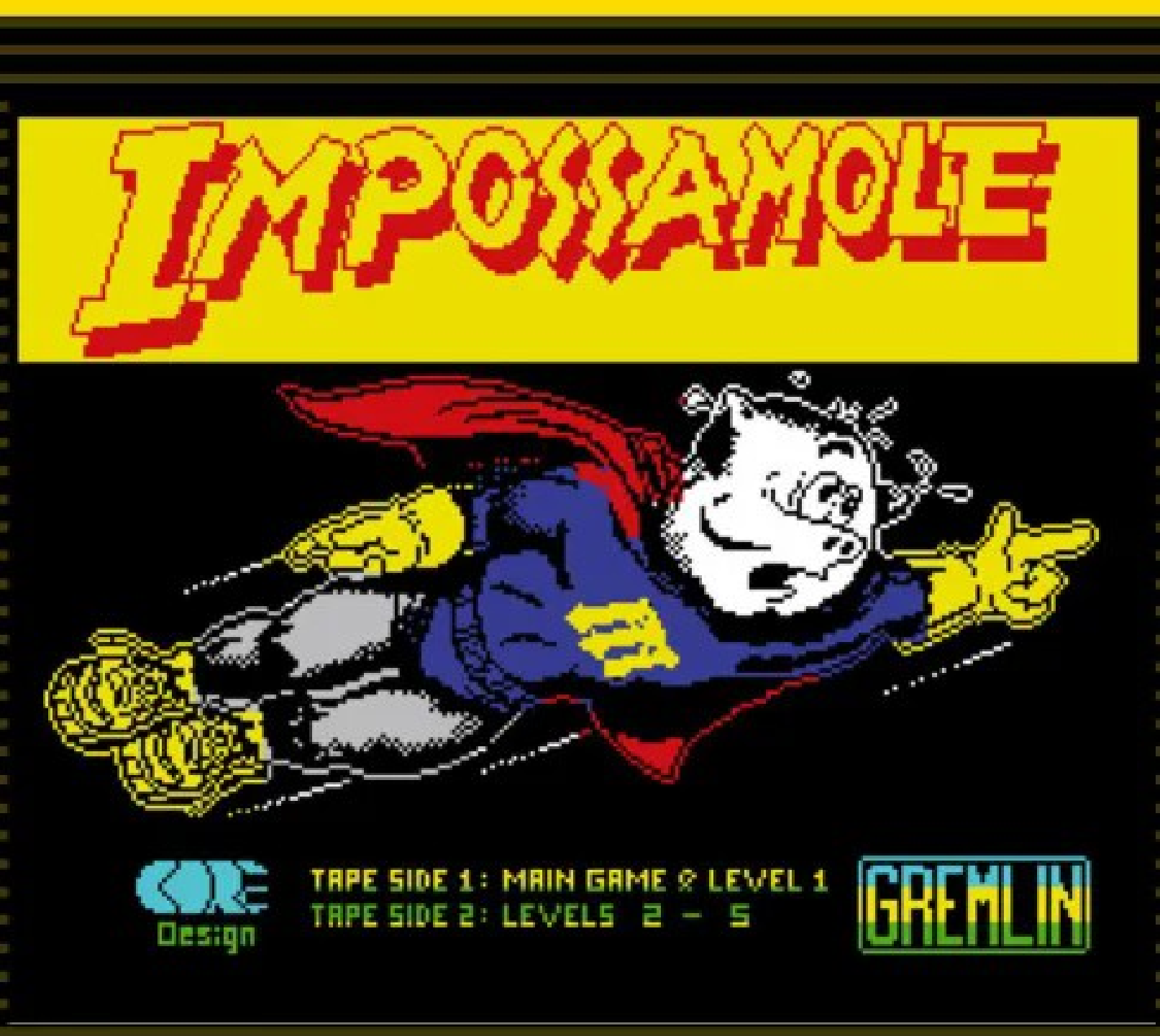


THE CHRISTMAS ISSUE HAS BEEN STOLEN. YOU BETTER FIND THOSE 100 PAGES OR ITS A P45 FOR YOUR XMAS BOX.

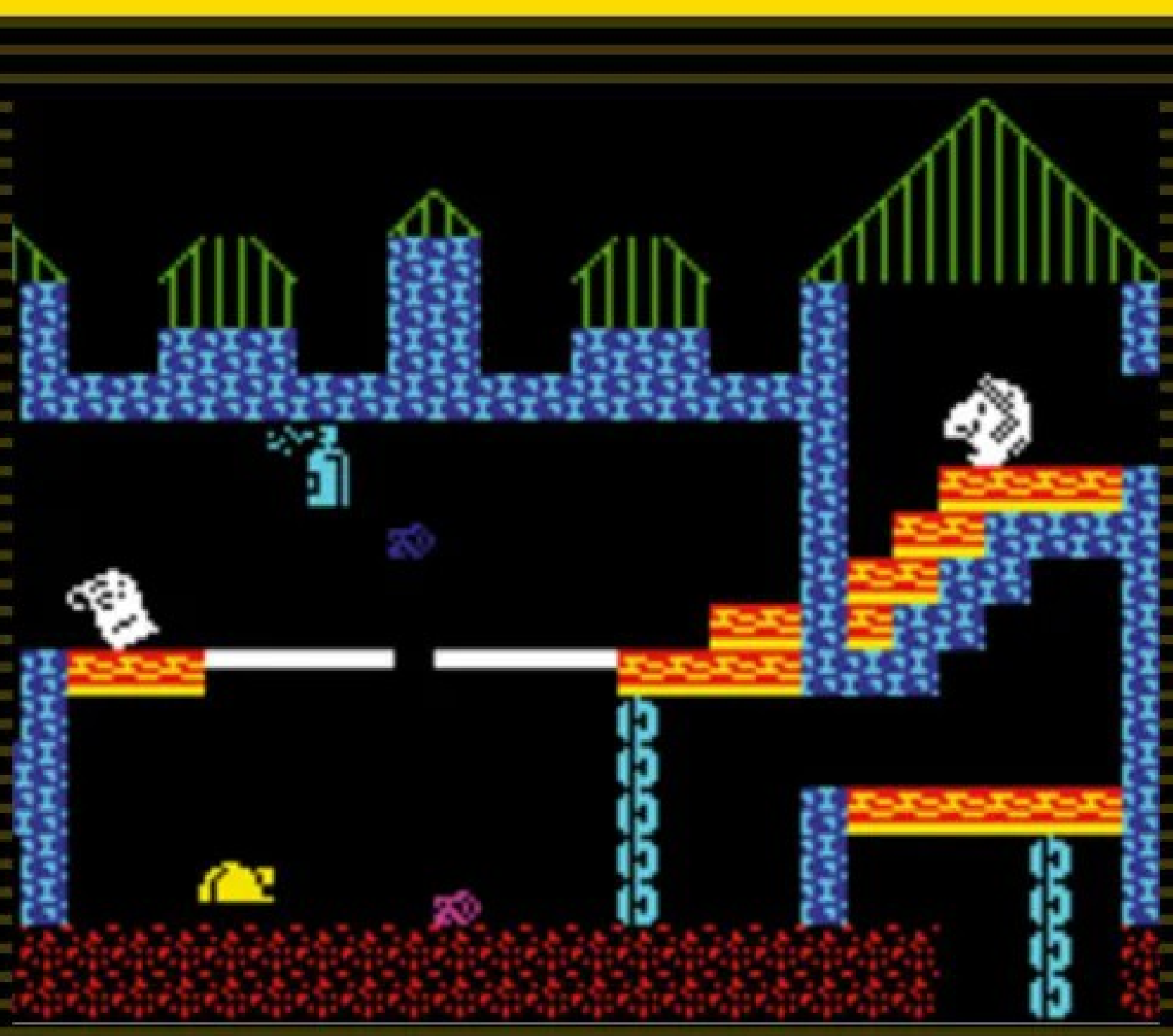
■ In *Monty's Christmas Special*, Monty searches for missing pages of **Retro Gamer**.



■ Classic Speccy magazine Your Sinclair is the setting for a free festive covermount game.



■ The final Monty game gave our hero super powers, it's just a shame it wasn't very good.



■ Monty tries his hand at politics as he attempts to nab the ballot papers and topple Arthur.

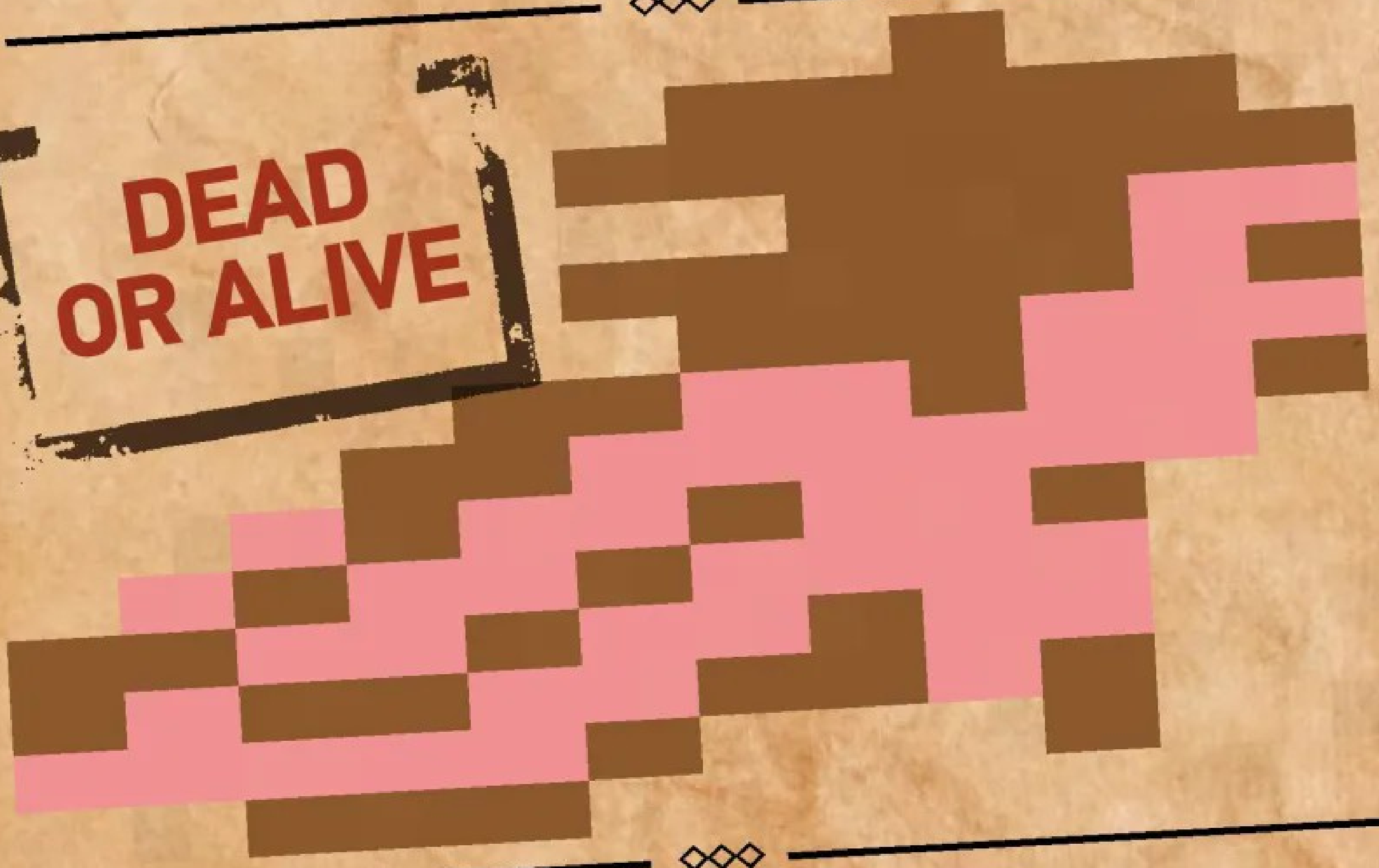
UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

If you think a fugitive mole is a bizarre subject choice for a computer game hero then check out these weird and wonderful creations. From vulcanised rubber to hyperactive toddlers, in the halcyon days of gaming almost anything could take the centre stage in a computer game…

WANTED

ST HELEN

DEAD OR ALIVE



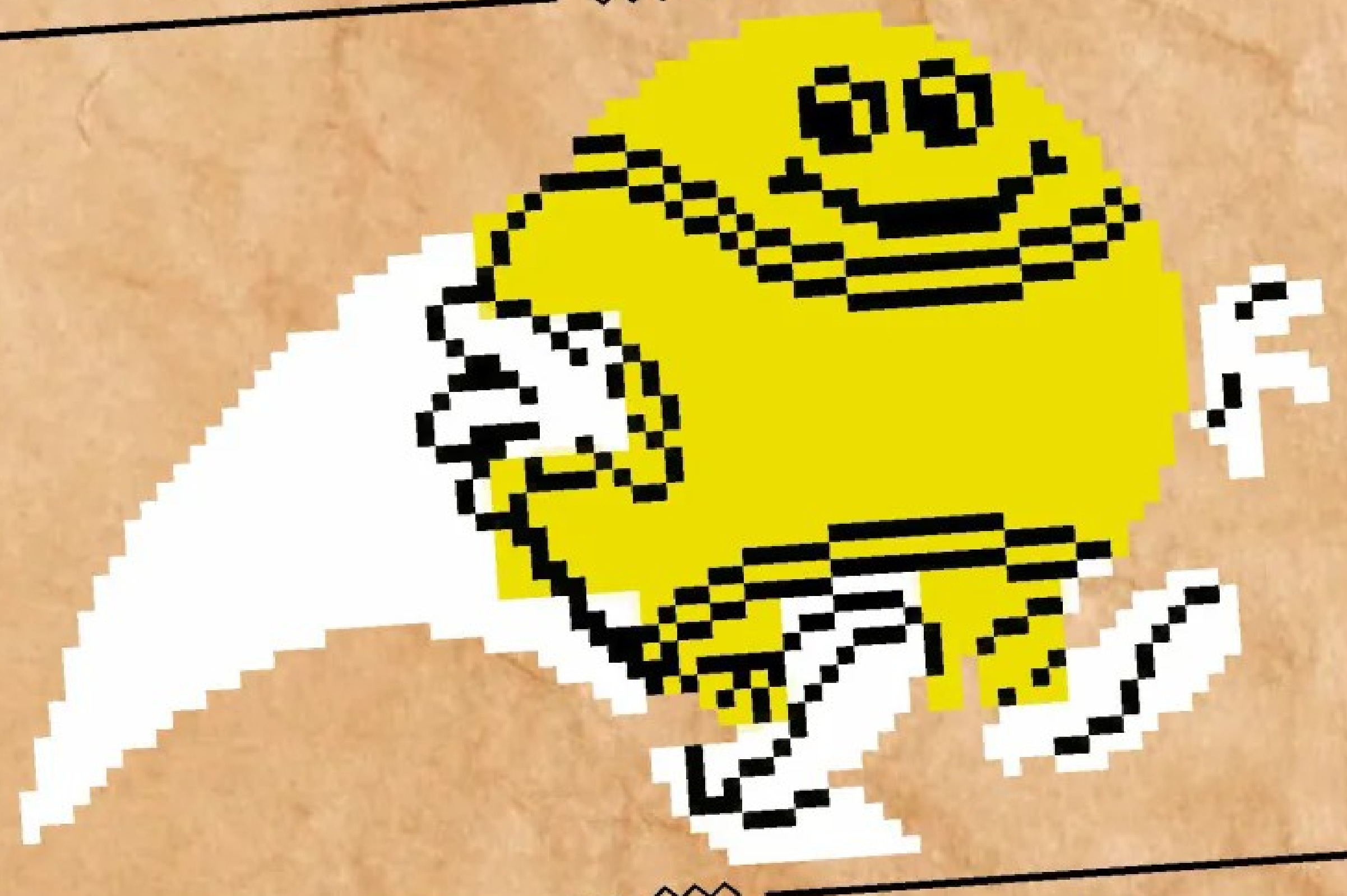
Description: A winged angel with her breasts out. Last seen defending the galaxy in *Insects In Space*.

Crimes: Unnecessary display of angelic flesh in a game intended for minors and one of the least 'sensible' character designs we've ever seen from Sensible Software.

£900 REWARD

WANTED

BOUNDER



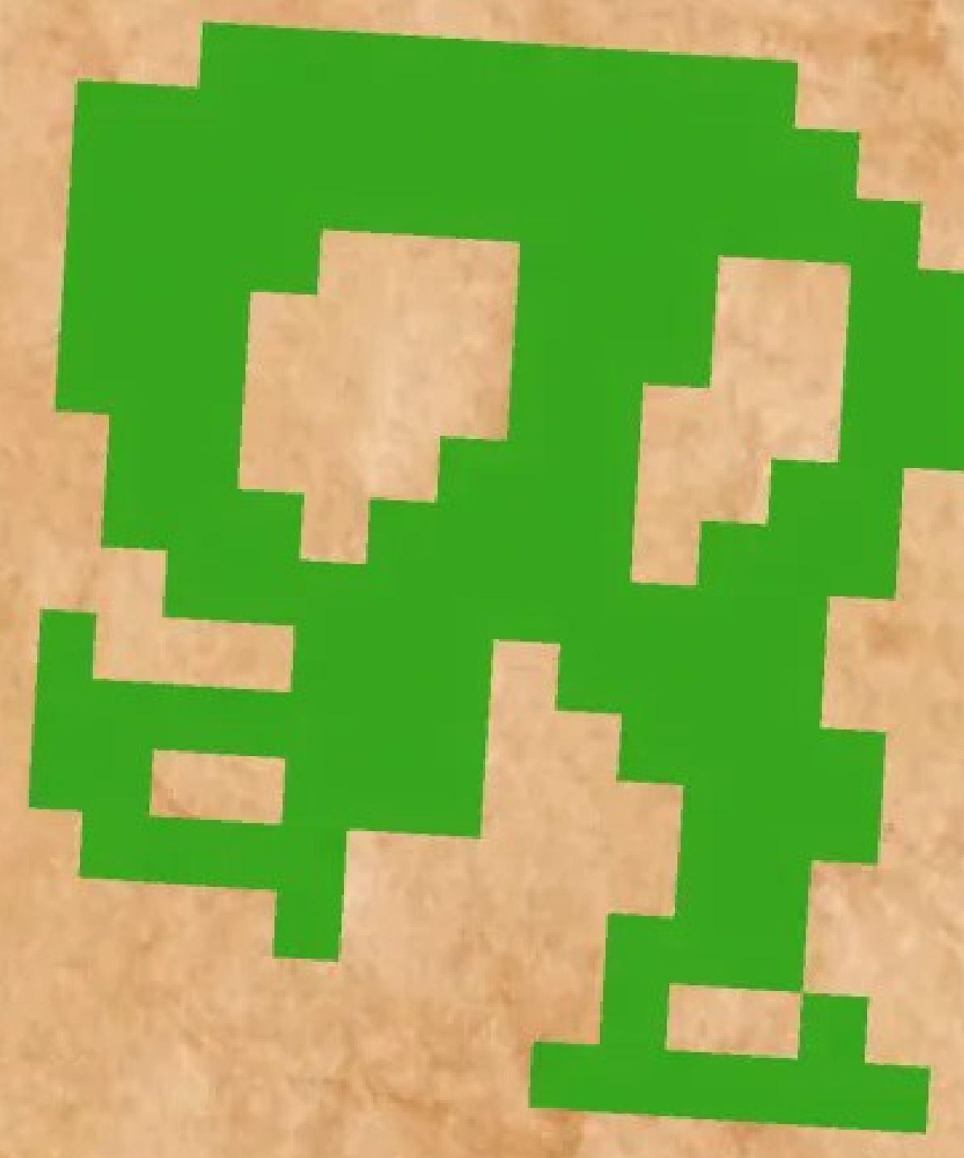
description: A bouncing yellow tennis ball with a little face on it. Last seen in Bounder and Bounder 2.

Crimes: Constantly insists on bouncing from wall to wall to both confuse his enemies and those who try to control him. Must be restrained at all costs.

£190 REWARD

WANTED

HORACE



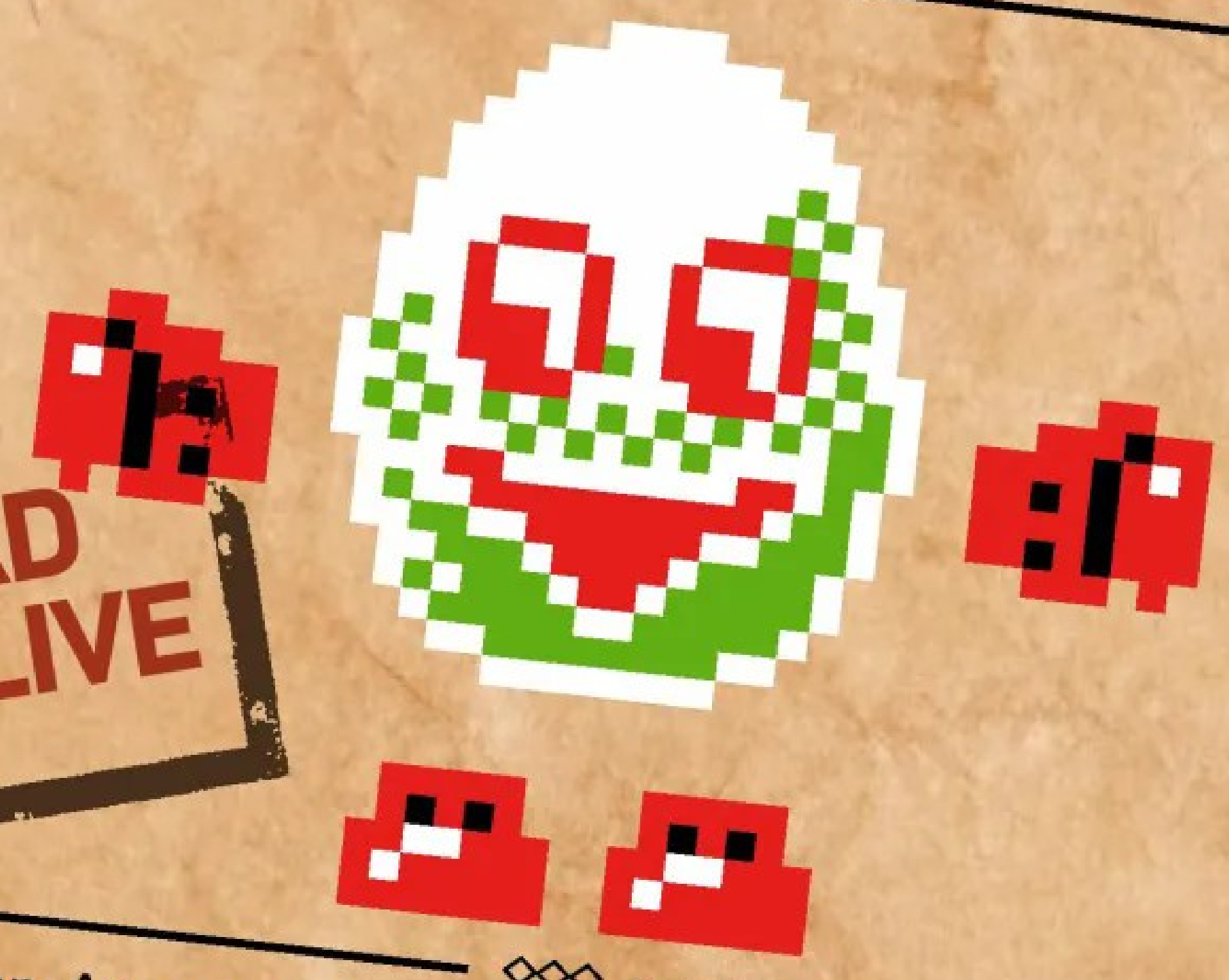
Description: Looks like a headless bipedal alien with eyes where the pectorals should be.

Crimes: Unsafely competing in a skiing event, despite his lack of arms. Appearing in a rubbish *Pac-Man* clone and generally daring to defy any recognisable form.

£48,000 REWARD

WANTED

DIZZY



DEAD OR ALIVE

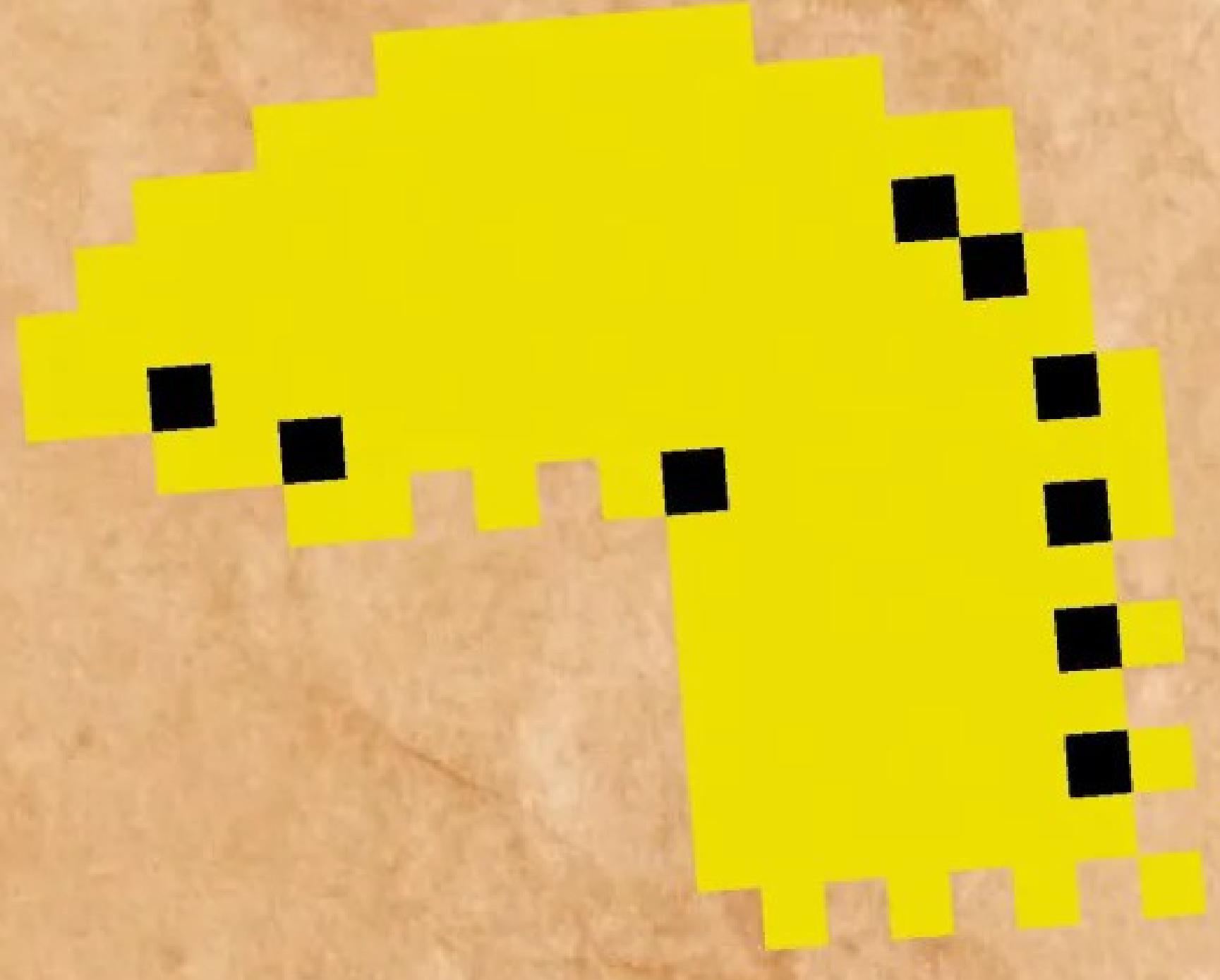
Description: An egg with disembodied hands and feet, who sometimes resorts to wearing a disguise.

Crimes: Stealing the possessions of his friends, often three at a time. Rolling into obvious traps far too often. And repeatedly avoiding his long overdue sequel.

£800 REWARD

WANTED

KREEZER



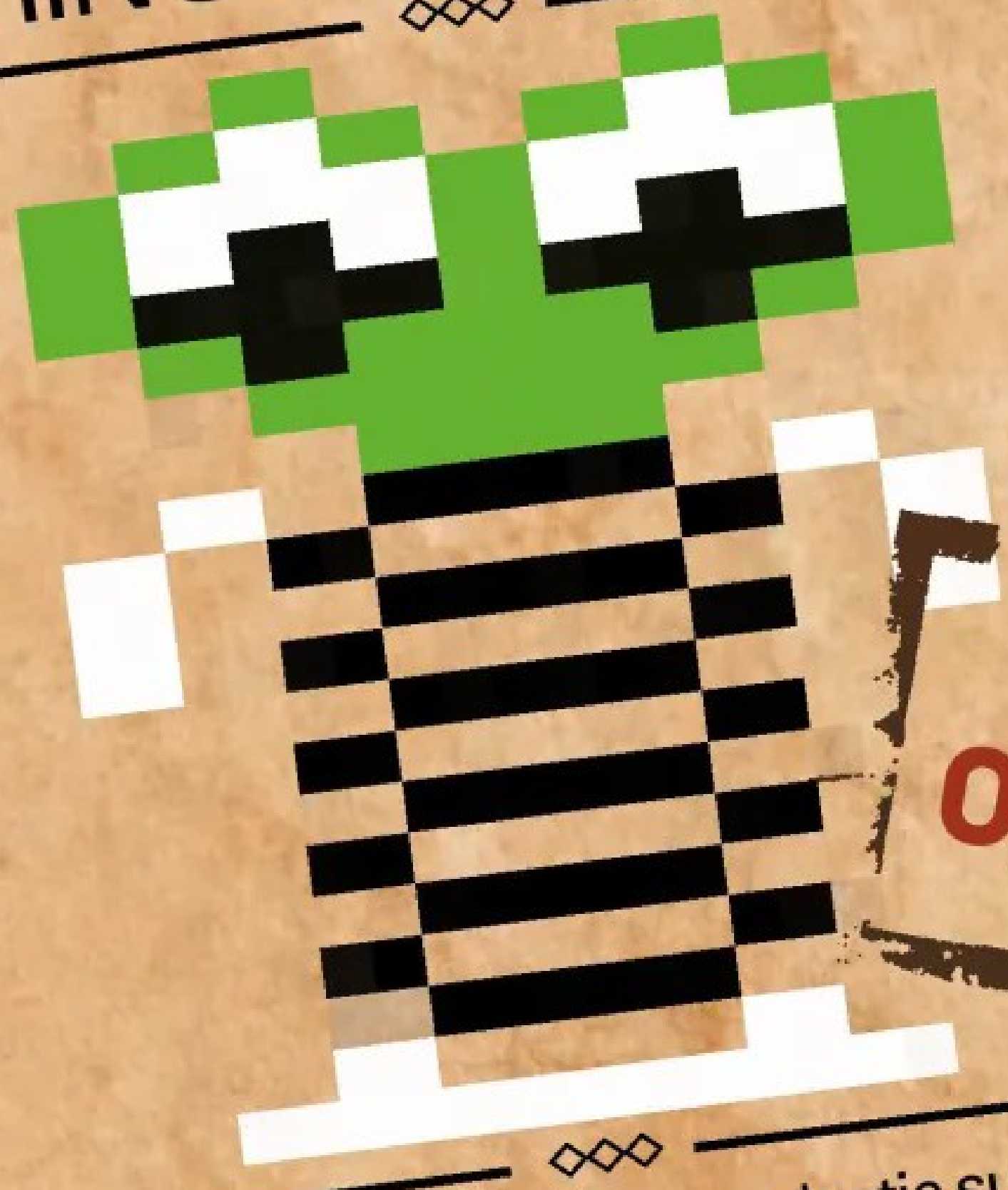
Description: A slinky. That's the best description we can give to the bizarre hero of *Frost Byte*.

Crimes: Being able to fire bullets without any obvious firearm. Kreezer is suspected of carrying illegally concealed weapons. Also wanted for impersonating a copyrighted child's toy.

£700 REWARD

WANTED

THING ON A SPRING



DEAD OR ALIVE

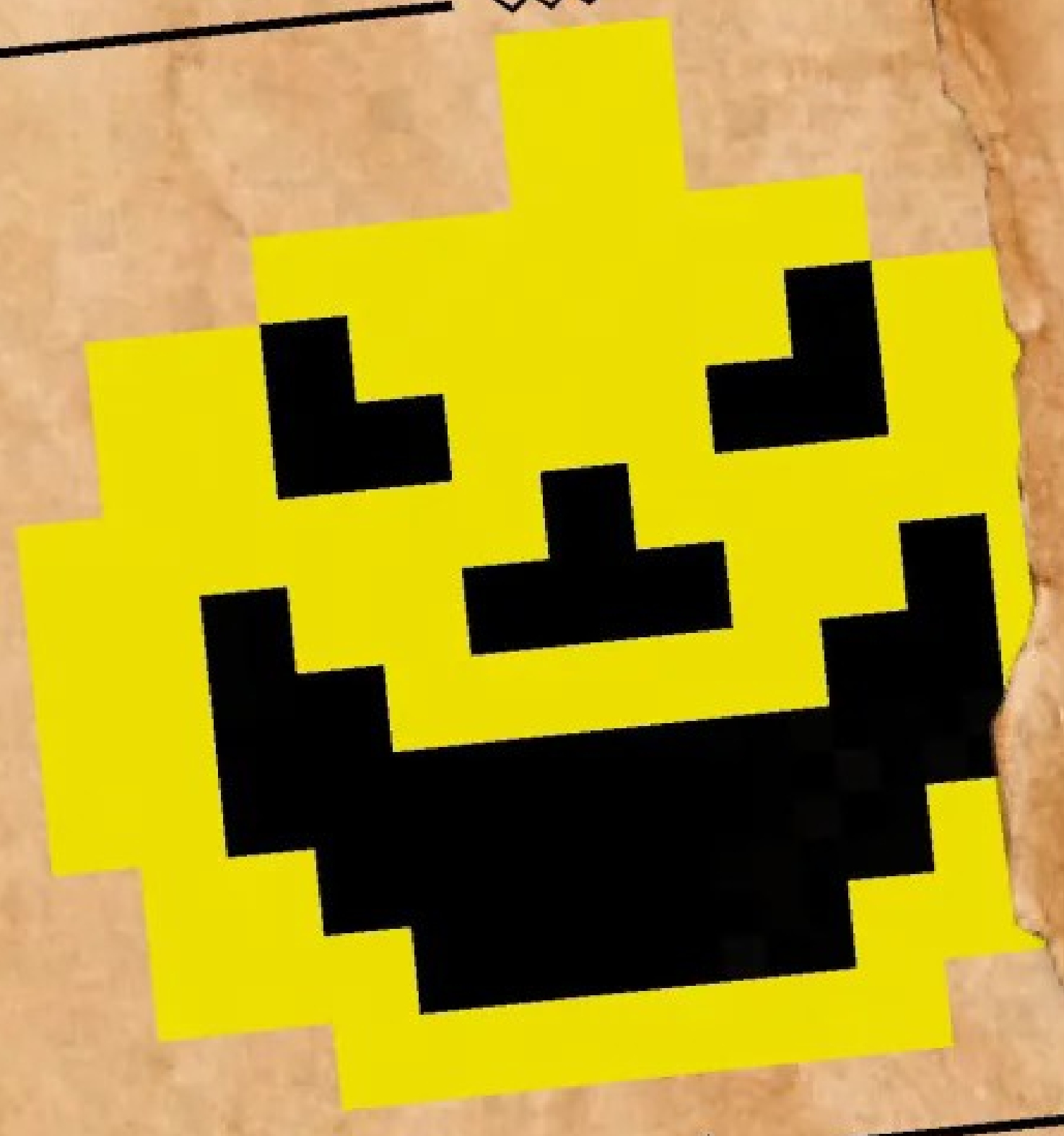
Description: Resembles one of those plastic suction toys you may have stuck down on the dining room table using saliva.

Crimes: Having an inaccurate name: he's more a 'thing that is a spring', really. Being yet another bouncy 8-bit platform game hero. How original.

£550 REWARD

WANT

PUMPKIN



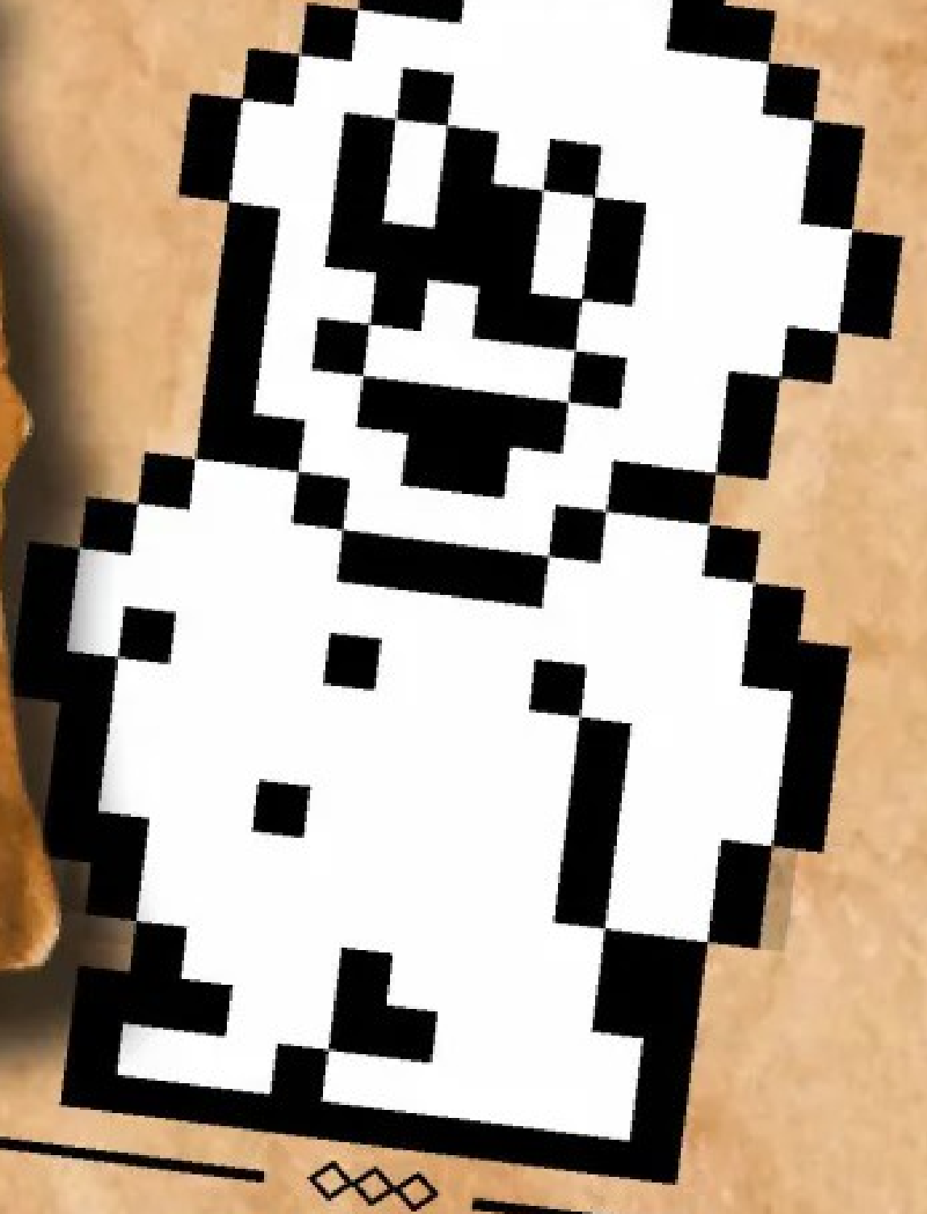
Description: Looks like a pumpkin. Sounds like a pumpkin. Is actually a pumpkin.

Crimes: Being one of the least controllable videogame characters in history. Appearing in a game that dared to imitate the godly *Wizball*. Smiling too much.

£350 REWARD

WANT

JACK



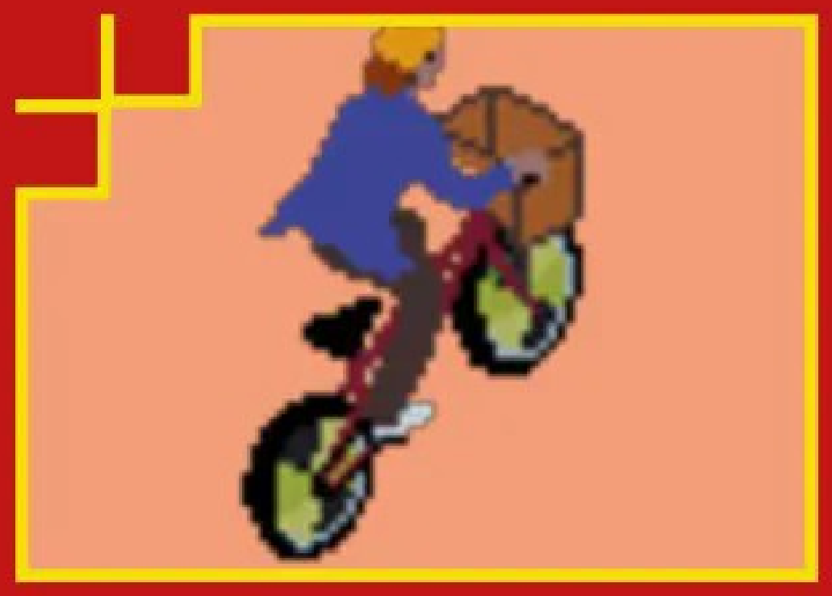
Description: A romper-suited toddler you'd half expect to see in the pages of *Viz*

Crimes: Vandalism, fraud, even business sabotaging were just some of the amoral methods Jack The Nipper used to become the original 8-bit tearaway.

£400 REWARD

PAPERBOY

Satchels and Spokey Dokeys at the ready, for this icon we're back peddling to 1984 to meet the hardest working hero in videogames



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** PAPERBOY
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** PAPERBOY
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** PAPERBOY: SPECIAL DELIVERY
- » **FINEST HOUR:** PAPERBOY
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** DELIVERING PAPERS, DUH

Realism must always take a backseat to entertainment in videogames. If it were imperative that videogames had to be factually accurate all of the time then *Super Mario Bros.* would be a game about fitting pressure pumps to gravity-fed shower systems, and because soldiers don't actually have the ability to miraculously heal bullet wounds by hiding behind bookshelves, games like *Modern Warfare 2* would be unbearably challenging.

Even at the dawn of the medium though, videogame makers have been trying to bridge that gap between entertainment and realism. And the purest product of this marriage were games that tried to offer a virtual interpretation of a real-life, and often mundane, job. Throughout the years, a wide variety of occupations have been tackled by videogame makers. Some have touched on what it would be like to work as a downtrodden barman serving drinks in a pub populated by aggressive cowboys (*Tapper*), while others have tried to offer a glimpse of the cut-and-thrust world of the stockbroker (*Wall Street Kid*), allowing you to buy and sell imaginary shares and earn yourself plenty of make-believe money.

This peculiar videogame phenomenon started with one game, and ironically it was a title that attempted to impersonate the very first job that most people ever have while growing up. Released by Atari in 1984, *Paperboy* tried to replicate the daily slog by millions of kids across the planet every morning. Playing the role of a seemingly detested paperboy, your job was simply to deliver newspapers to all of your customers. But despite its somewhat dull-sounding premise, *Paperboy* cleverly added a strong kick of fun and hilarity to the banality by allowing players to cause as much damage to the property of non-subscribers as possible, and then finishing each round with a cool dirt track, complete with ramps and target boards to hone your paper-aiming on. Set over a week, *Paperboy* featured three streets of varying difficulty, and each was littered with all manner of weird human obstacles and hazards to avoid – be it aggressive mutts, kids trying to trip you up with their radio-controlled cars, two skinheads partaking in a comical street brawl, or car and motorcycle drivers with tunnel vision. With most arcade games asking players to shoot cascading waves of invading aliens, or bound from precariously positioned platforms in colourful worlds, it was *Paperboy*'s down-to-earth, easily identifiable premise that arguably made it a success.

While the game is a classic, very little is known about the central character – other than his profession, obviously. During gameplay, the unnamed boy's face is always concealed, either by the game's isometric perspective, which placed the camera just behind our hero, or through his baseball cap and satchel, which slumps comically over his head whenever he crashes his bike. The only glimpse you ever get of his freckly Alfred E. Neuman-style face is a small image printed on the front page of the fictional newspaper that he delivers – which, weirdly, also acts as the game's end-of-level results screen.

Most of Paperboy's personality comes through his cheeky troublemaking antics and humorous digitised commentary whenever he scores a direct hit with a timely tabloid or crashes into a hazard. Whether intentional, or simply by design to make life for the programmers and artists a little simpler, being one of the first videogame heroes that kids could really emphasise with meant that Paperboy really didn't need to have a big personality to attract fans and win appeal.

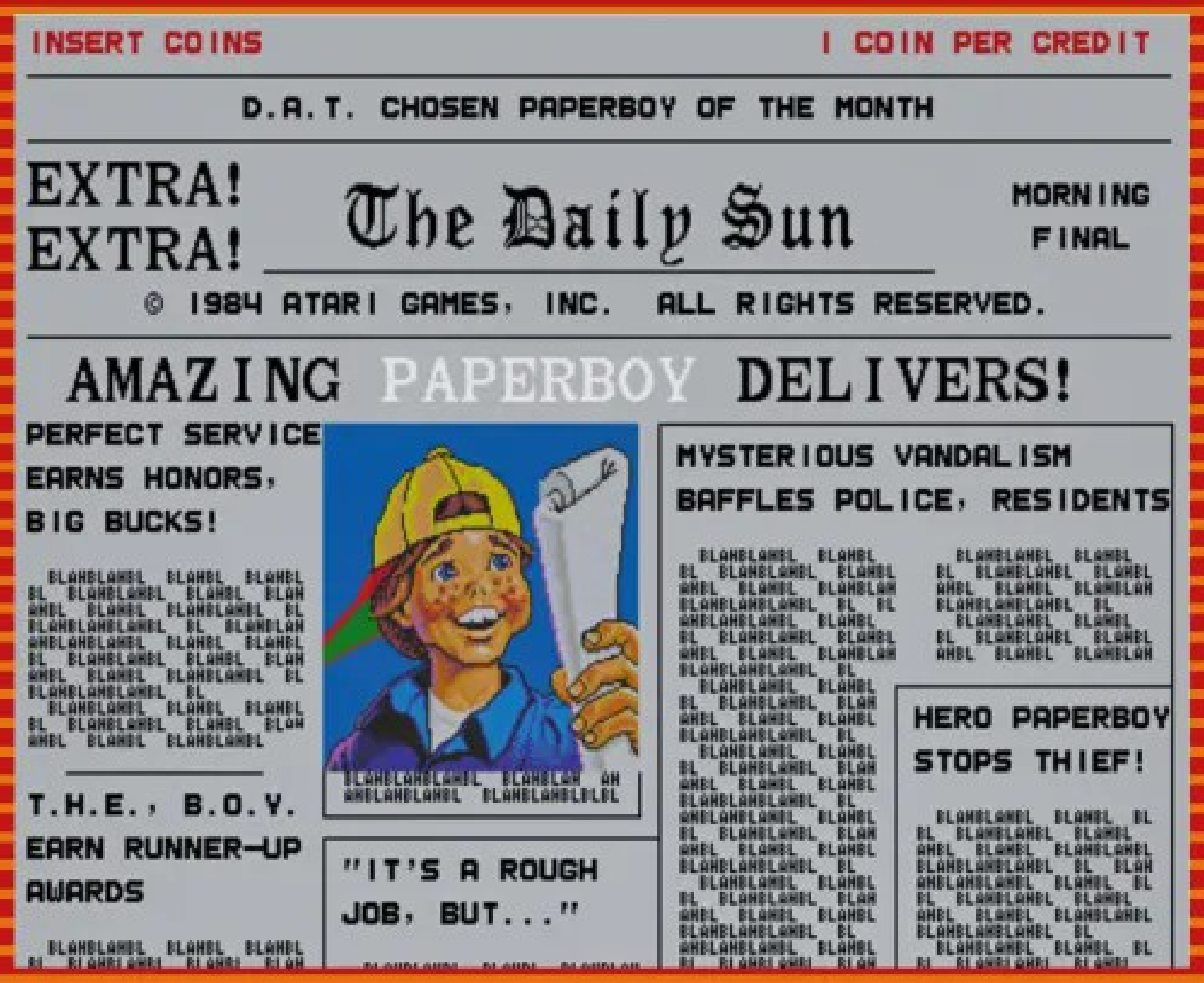
It's odd to think that kids in the mid-Eighties were getting up at the crack of dawn to deliver newspapers, and then using the money they earned to pump into *Paperboy* to replay their self-same job in the virtual-world. But this brings us to an interesting point about the game. Perhaps another draw was that it gave kids the opportunity to prove and compare their paper-delivering skills with their friends. After all, the same skills are required to do the job in both worlds – you have to be capable of avoiding obstacles, be alert of your surroundings and time your newspaper lobbing to perfection. The only real difference is that in the videogame incarnation you had to pay for the privilege. But at least the game never forced you to get up at some silly hour on a miserable and blustery morning to battle the elements just to deliver the daily news. Now that's a slice of realism we could happily do without. ★

> **"Paperboy replicates the daily slog of millions of kids across the planet"**

> MAGIC MOMENTS

ATARI GAMES

■ The *Paperboy* arcade cabinet was memorable for its unique handlebar controls.



INSERT COINS
1 COIN PER CREDIT

D.A.T. CHOSEN PAPERBOY OF THE MONTH

EXTRA! EXTRA!
The Daily Sun
MORNING FINAL

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AMAZING PAPERBOY DELIVERS!

PERFECT SERVICE EARNS HONORS, BIG BUCKS!

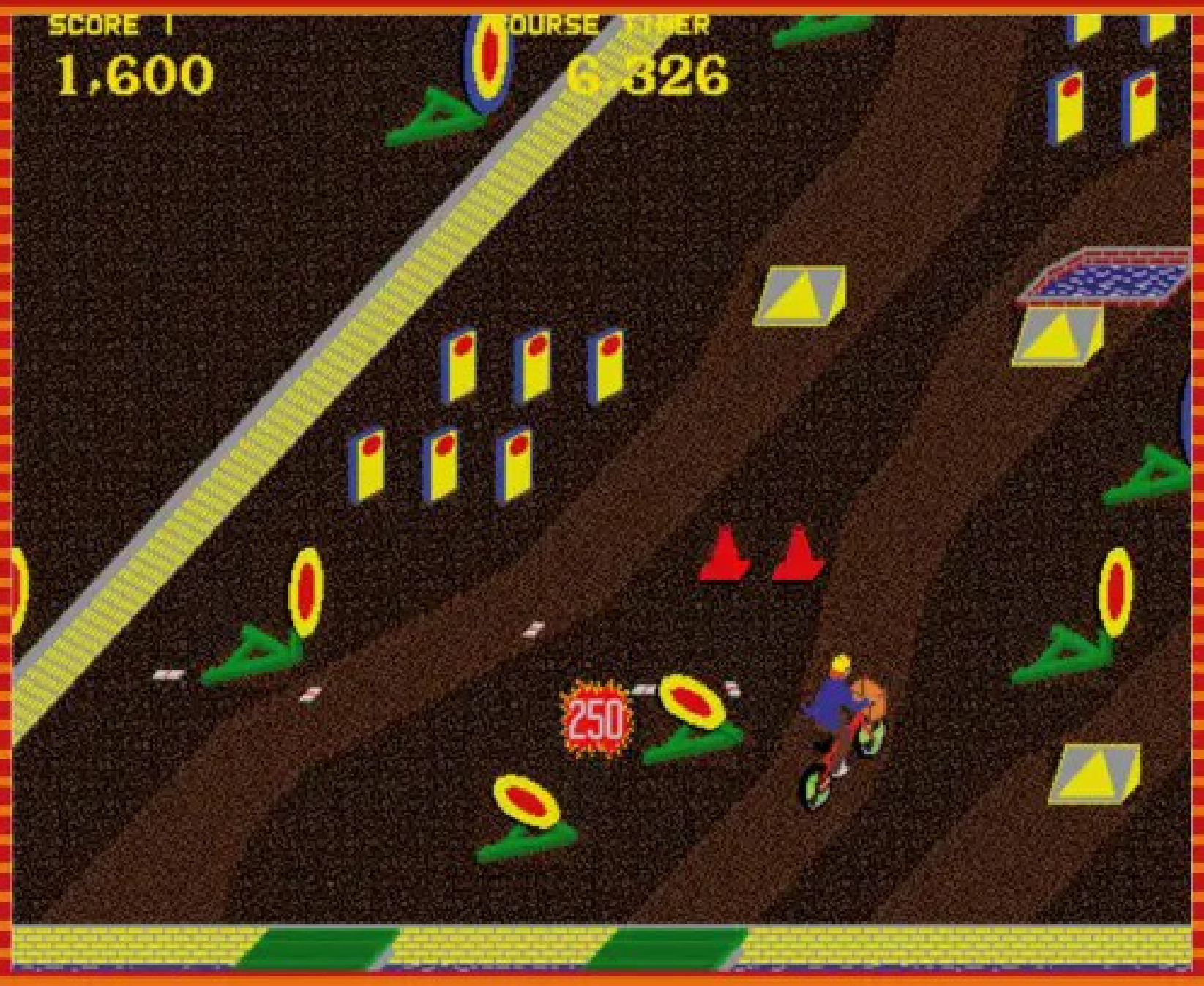
MYSTERIOUS VANDALISM BAFFLES POLICE, RESIDENTS

HERO PAPERBOY STOPS THIEF!

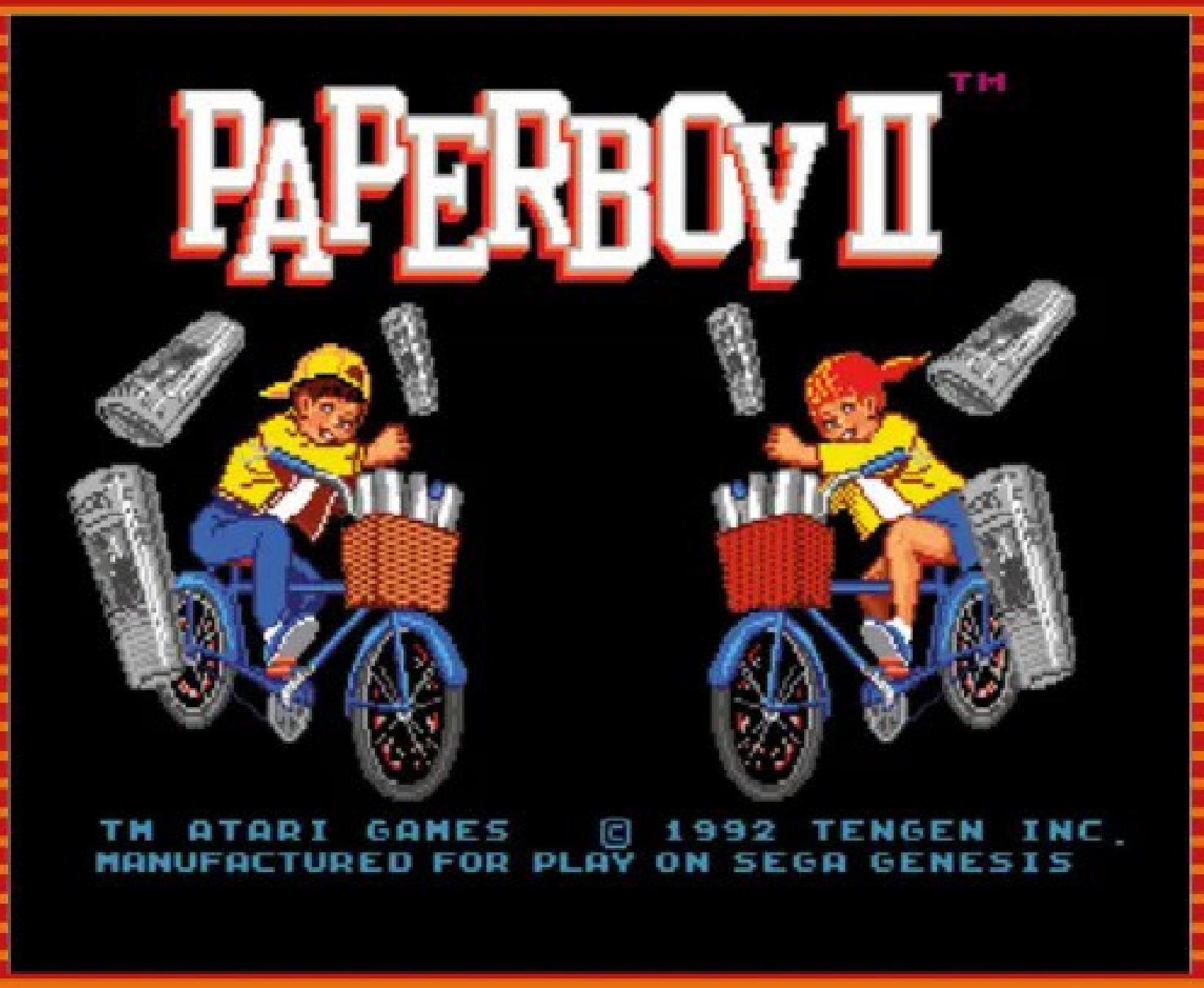
T.H.E., B.O.Y. EARN RUNNER-UP AWARDS

"IT'S A ROUGH JOB, BUT..."

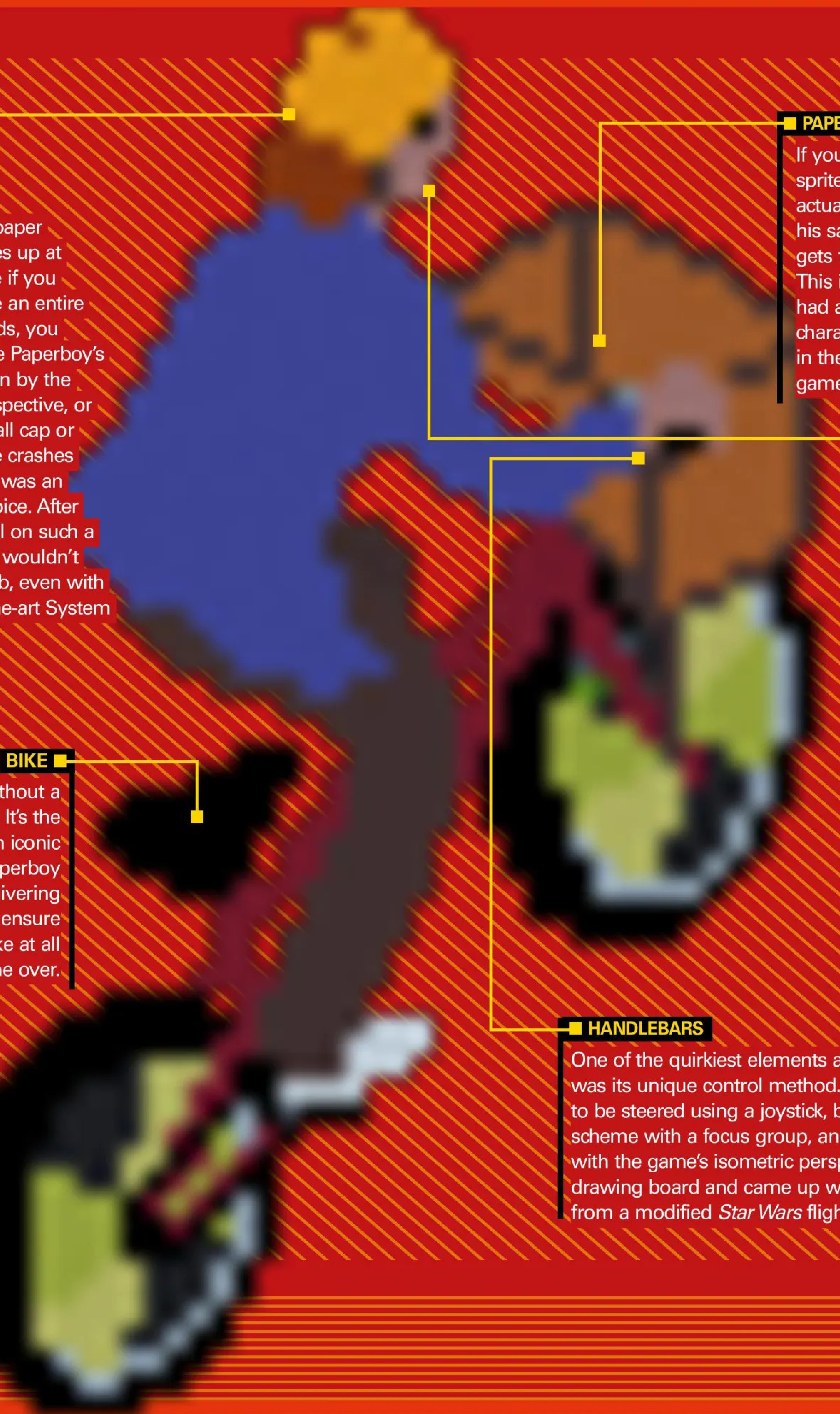
■ Finish a week of rounds and Paperboy makes the front page – must've been a slow news week.



■ After delivering newspapers in American suburbs, Paperboy gets to unwind on a dirt track.


PAPERBOY II
TM
TM ATARI GAMES © 1992 TENGEN INC.
MANUFACTURED FOR PLAY ON SEGA GENESIS

■ *Paperboy II* saw a watershed moment for sexual equality with the introduction of Papergirl.



HEAD

Apart from the newspaper screenshot that flashes up at the end of your game if you successfully complete an entire week's worth of rounds, you never really get to see Paperboy's face – it's either hidden by the game's isometric perspective, or the character's baseball cap or mailbag whenever he crashes his bike. Perhaps this was an intentional design choice. After all, getting facial detail on such a small character sprite wouldn't have been an easy job, even with Atari's then state-of-the-art System II arcade hardware.

BIKE

No paperkid is complete without a pushbike to save their feet. It's the tool of their trade, and is an iconic and integral part of the Paperboy sprite because as well as delivering newspapers you have to also ensure that Paperboy remains on his bike at all times, otherwise it's game over.

PAPERS

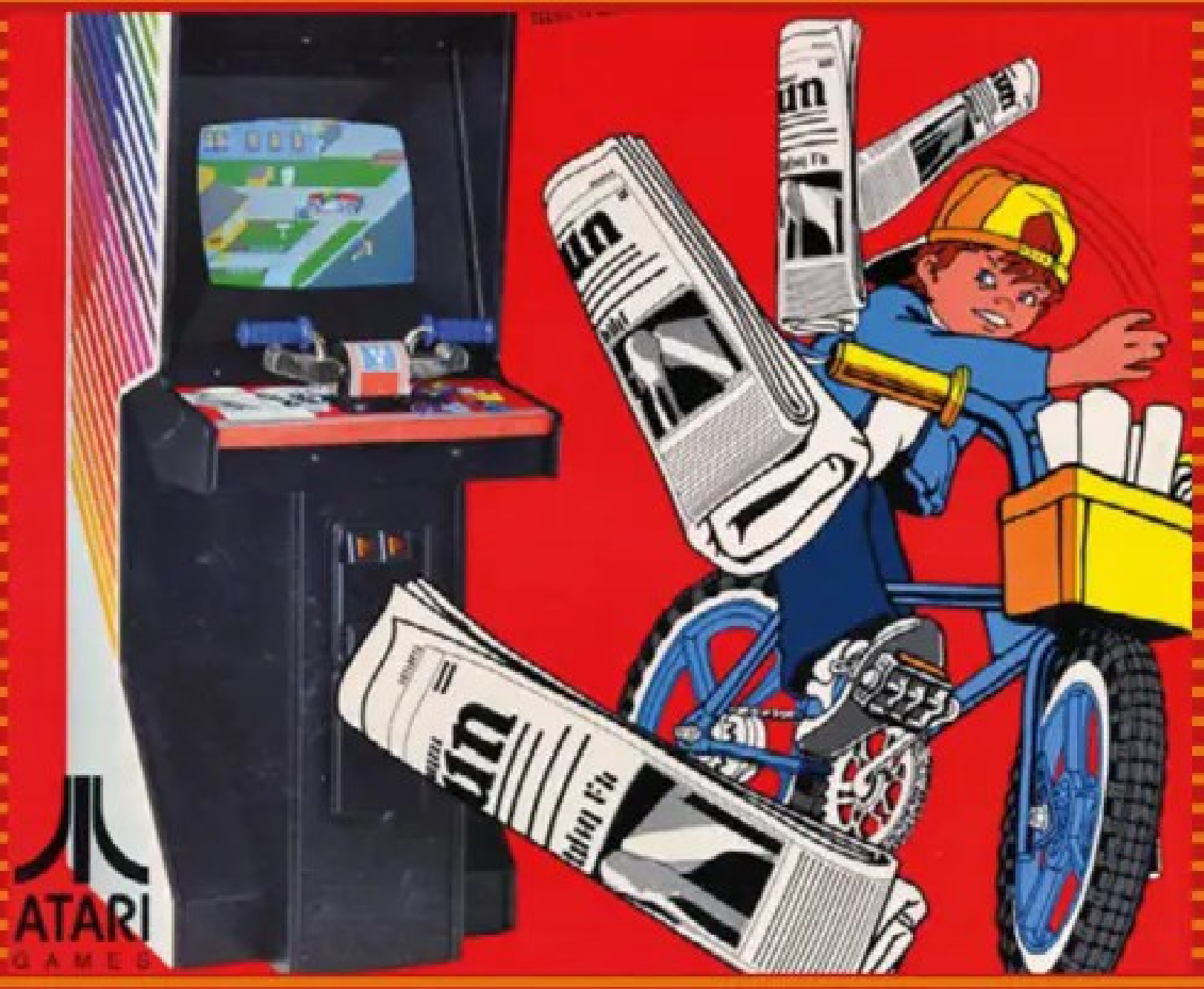
If you look closely at the Paperboy sprite you'll notice that he doesn't actually toss papers from out of his satchel – the mail seemingly gets fired from out of his head. This is because Paperboy's creators had a nightmare trying to give the character a throwing animation, and in the end decided to release the game without one.

MOUTH

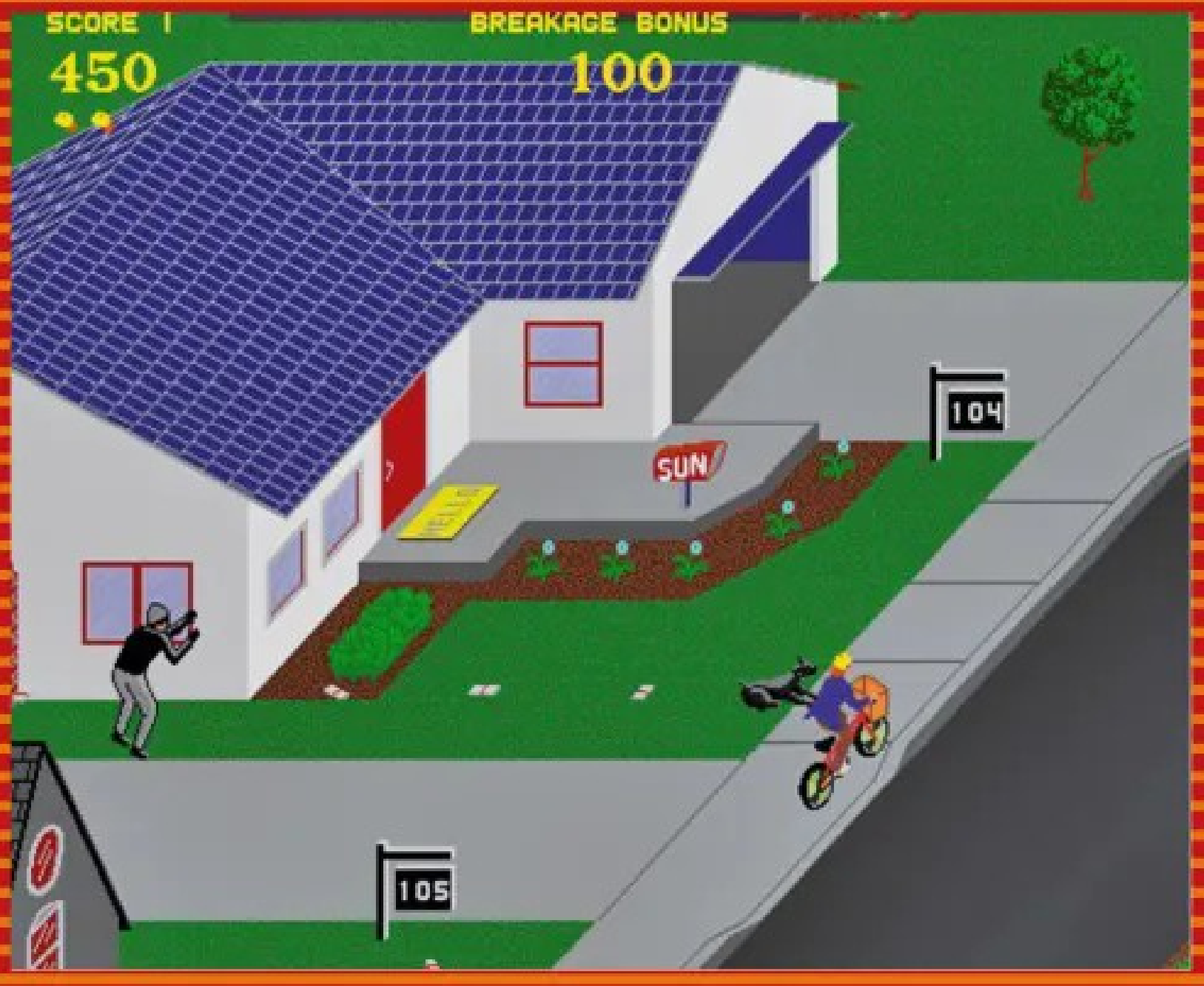
Paperboy was one of the first arcade games to feature digitised speech, and Atari used it to give a voice to the game's hero. Throughout the game Paperboy can be heard continually cracking wise – expressing his dismay at getting mowed down by a sentient lawn mower or his glee at getting a paper in a mailbox with a timely lob. Interestingly, the voice of Paperboy is actually that of Atari marketing rep Don Traeger, who worked alongside Paperboy's creators John Salwitz and Dave Ralston, and helped to make the game a success.

HANDLEBARS

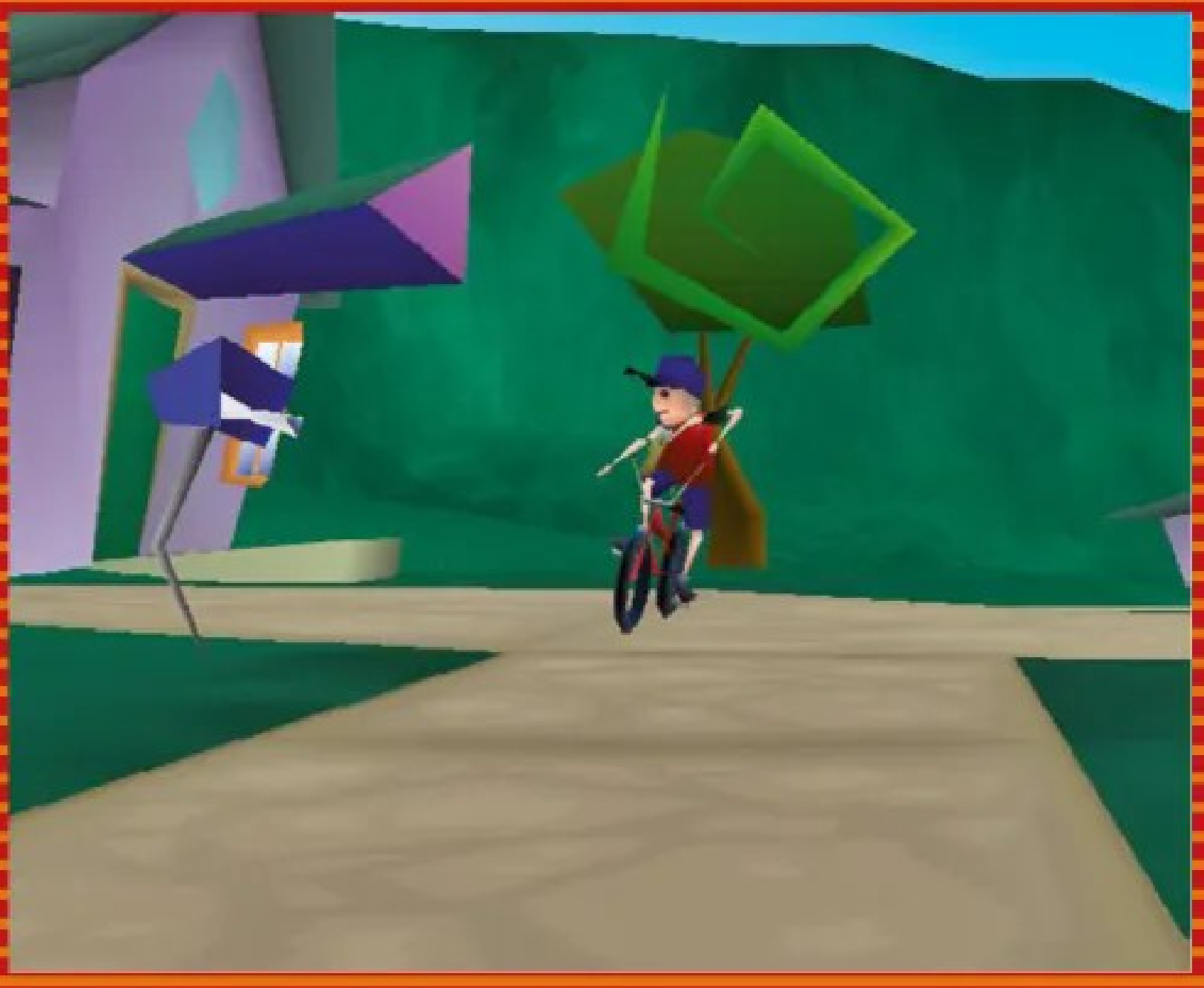
One of the quirkiest elements about the *Paperboy* arcade cab was its unique control method. Originally *Paperboy* was going to be steered using a joystick, but when Atari tested the control scheme with a focus group, and the panel found it confusing with the game's isometric perspective, they went back to the drawing board and came up with a handlebar controller made from a modified *Star Wars* flight controller.



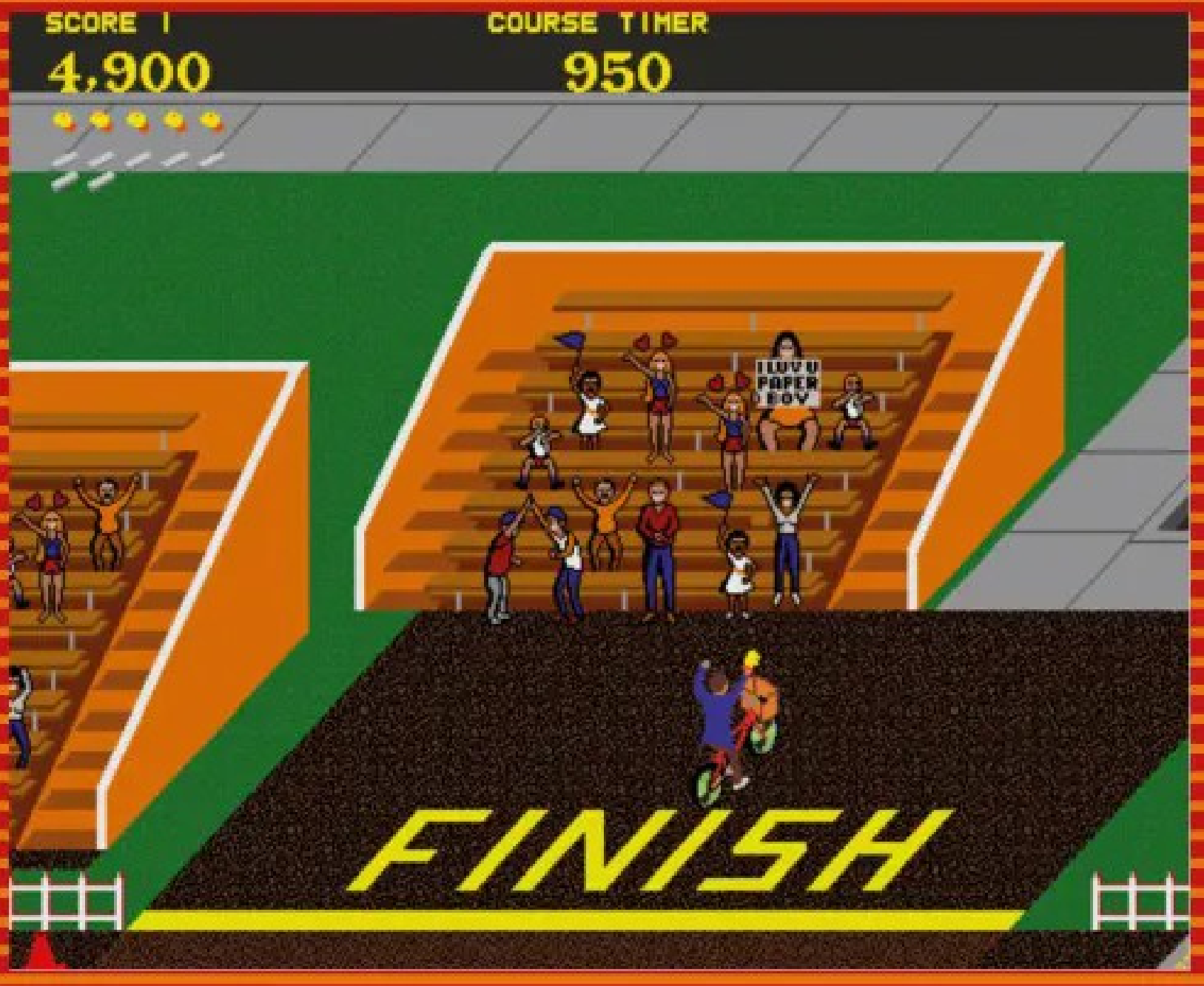
■ *Paperboy* was one of the first games to feature digitised speech.



■ The streets were full of ways to score extra brownie points with customers.



■ Paperboy went all 3D on the N64. Sadly, the game wasn't a patch on the original.



■ Paperboy finishes his round and receives a hero's welcome from fans and supporters.

INSERT COINS 1 COIN PER CREDIT

D.A.T. CHOSEN PAPERBOY OF THE MONTH

EXTRA!
EXTRA!

The Daily Sun

MORNING
FINAL

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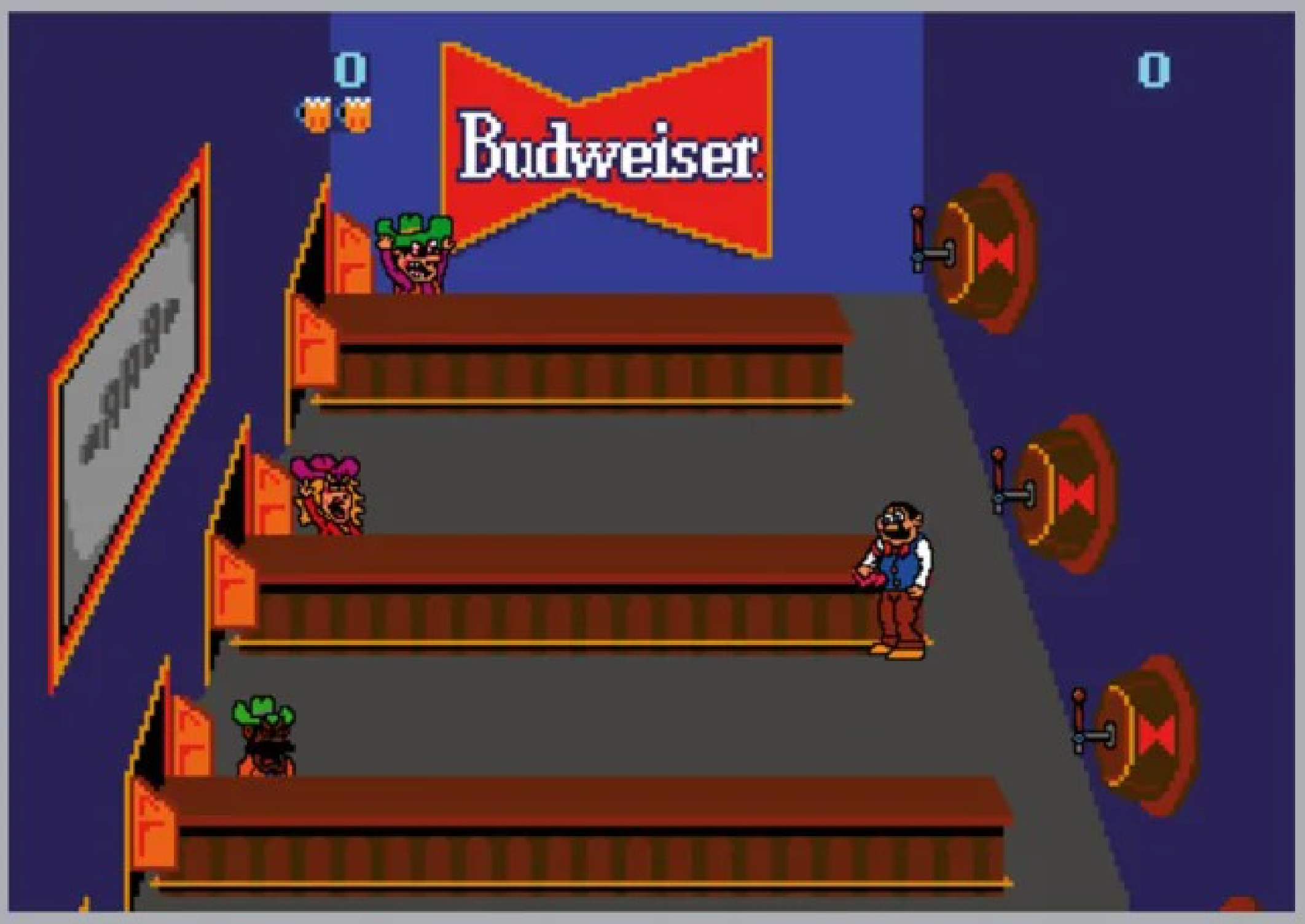
JOB SECTION

Looking to better your chances of making friends and lovers with materialistic people, or perhaps you've been toying with the idea of embarking on a new career in giant gorilla removal? Then why not leaf through the *The Daily Sun*'s job section, which is packed full of exciting job opportunities for any young virtual graduate



BAR MANAGER REQUIRED FOR TAPPER BAR

Job Description
A very demanding saloon in Texas is currently looking to hire a tenacious and unflustered bar manager to serve drinks (mostly beer) and collect money from our four separate bar areas simultaneously.

Required Skills
As they will be expected to run four bars singlehanded, the applicant must be well organised, steady on their feet, have a minimum two years' experience in bar management, and must demonstrate good numeracy and people skills.

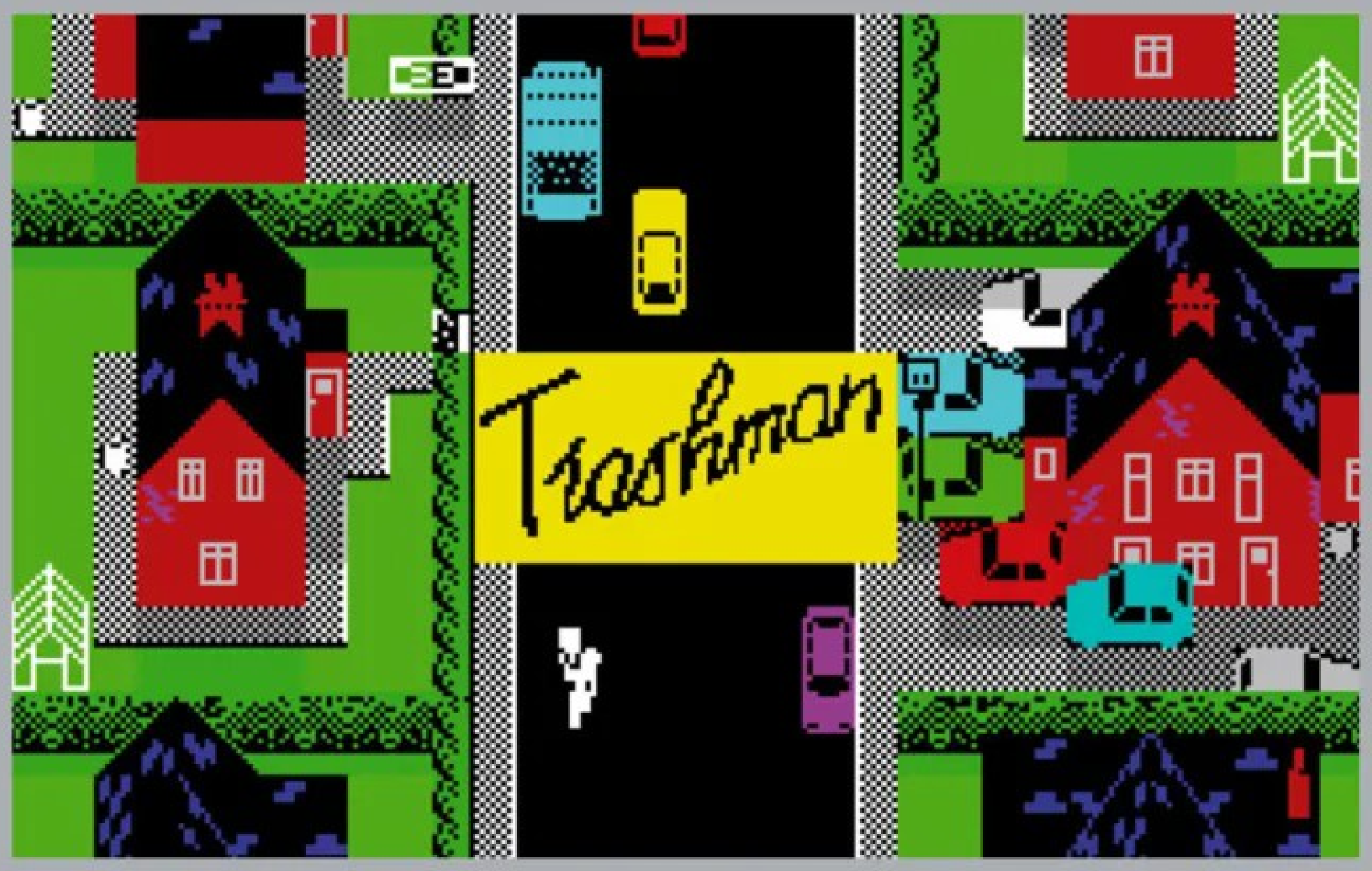
Benefits
As well as keeping all tips earned, the successful applicant will receive one free drink after each shift, and will also get to work in a warm friendly atmosphere (most of the time).

TRASHMAN NEEDED

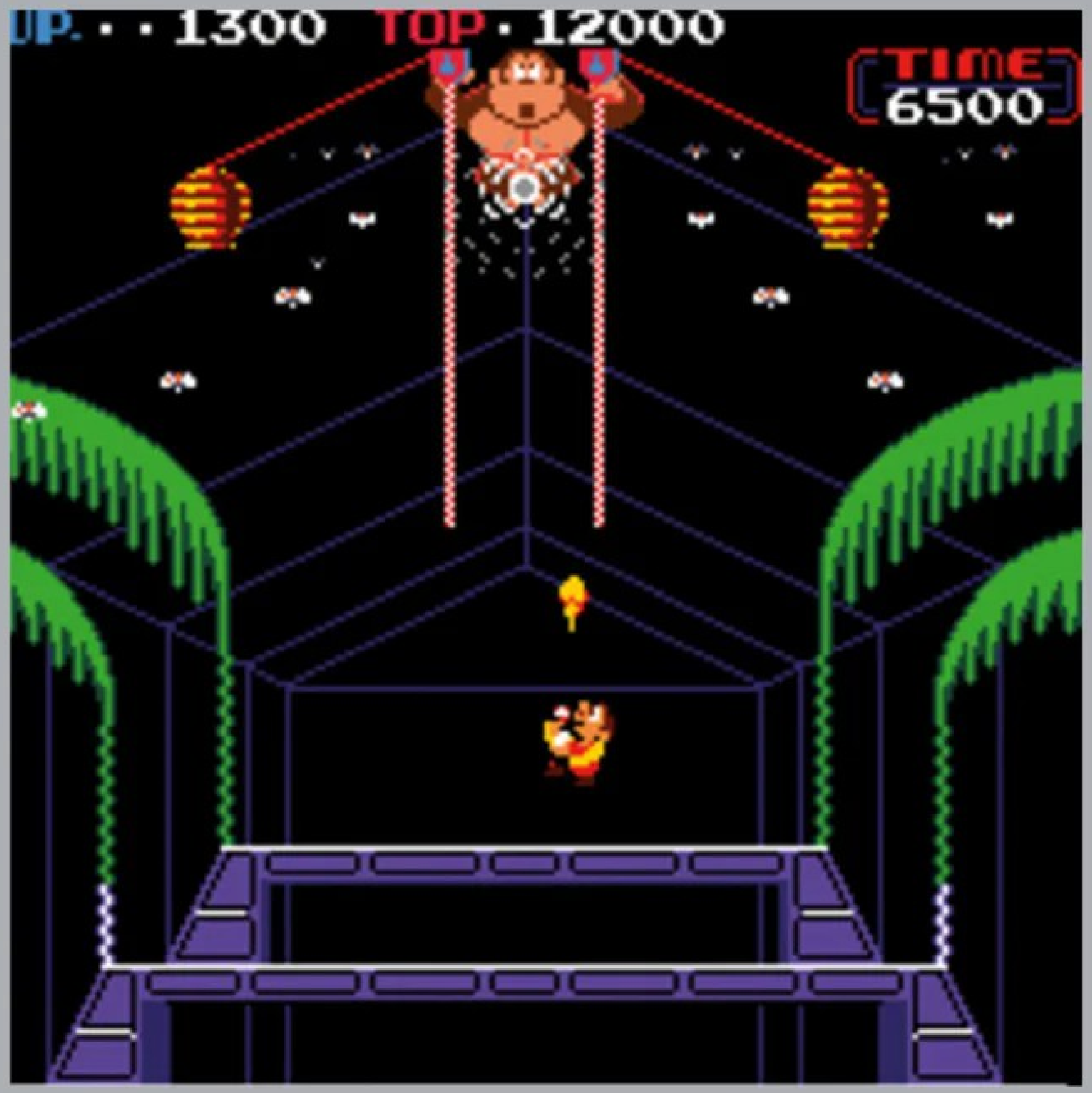
Job Description
An opportunity has arisen for a hardworking individual to join our team of refuse collectors. The successful candidate will be expected to meet stringent targets, have a good sense of road safety, and be approachable and friendly to customers.

Required Skills
The perfect candidate is someone who isn't afraid to muck in and get their hands dirty (though gloves will be provided), has good people skills and acute spatial awareness. They must also be able to work well under pressure and cope with the unique phenomena of 'colour clash'.

Benefits
You will be able to take advantage of our attractive pension scheme, and will receive first dibs on any valuable rubbish that gets left out for collection.



RENTOEXTERMINATE NOW HIRING



Job Description
A pest control company is currently looking for a brave and diligent bugman to join our newly established insect/gorilla division. Your main objective will be to combat the growing threat of vegetation destruction by nuisance insects and big stubborn giant gorillas.

Required Skills
It is essential that the successful applicant can work comfortably around insects, bees and gorillas, and must also be a good shot with a tin of bug-spray. Strictly no plumbers.

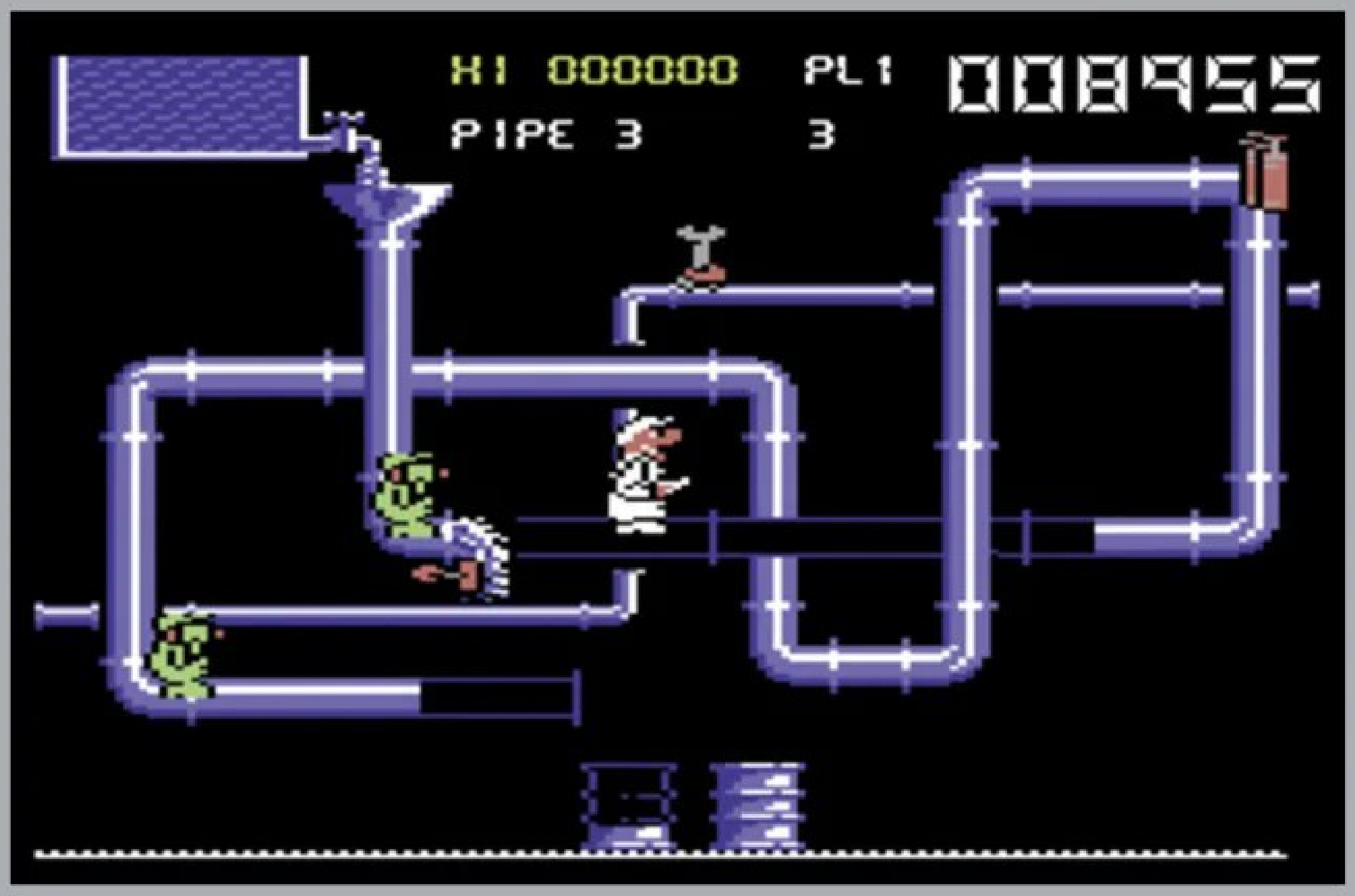
Benefits
As well as a lifetime supply of bug spray, you can also look forward to a very early retirement.

PLUMBER'S MATE NEEDED

Job Description
I am currently looking for a brave plumber's mate to assist me on a dangerous oil collection mission on a deep-sea oilrig. Your main duty will involve unblocking oil pipes to allow smooth functioning of the rig's oil extraction system.

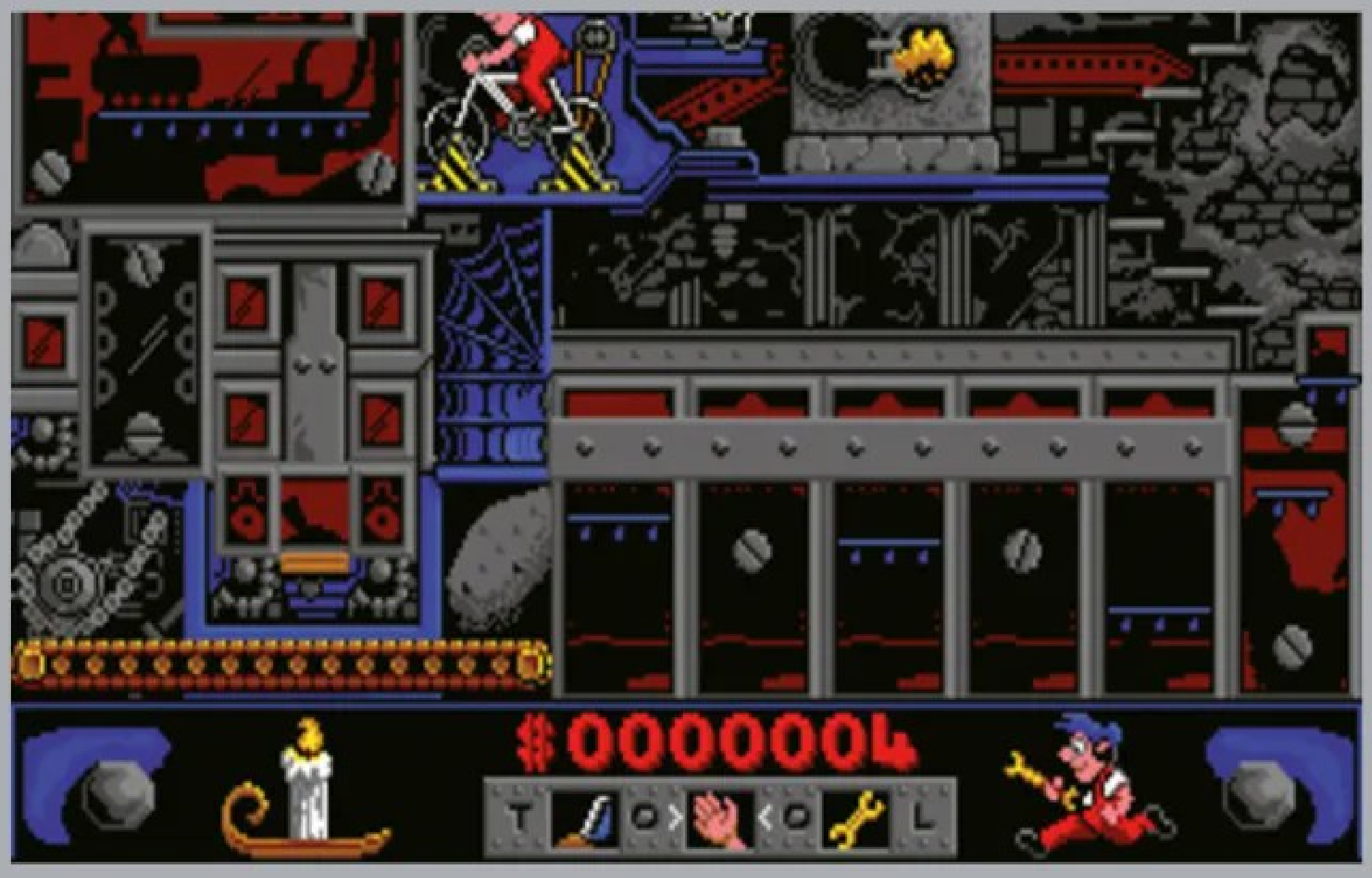
Required Skills
I am looking for someone who has a good knowledge of welding and plumbing, and who isn't bothered by working in hot and cramped conditions. Being a dab hand at unclogging things is also desirable too.

Benefits
As well as a great remuneration package, you will also receive a company van and free life insurance.



INDUSTRIAL MIGHT AND LOGIC VACANCY

Job Description
The toy company Industrial Might And Logic is currently seeking an engineer to work the night shift and oversee the maintenance of their toy-making machine, The Beast, which produces their popular *Star Wars* action figure range.



Required Skills
IML requires an individual with a strong analytical mind, and the ability to work well under pressure. A basic knowledge of *Star Wars* is also desirable for quality control reasons.

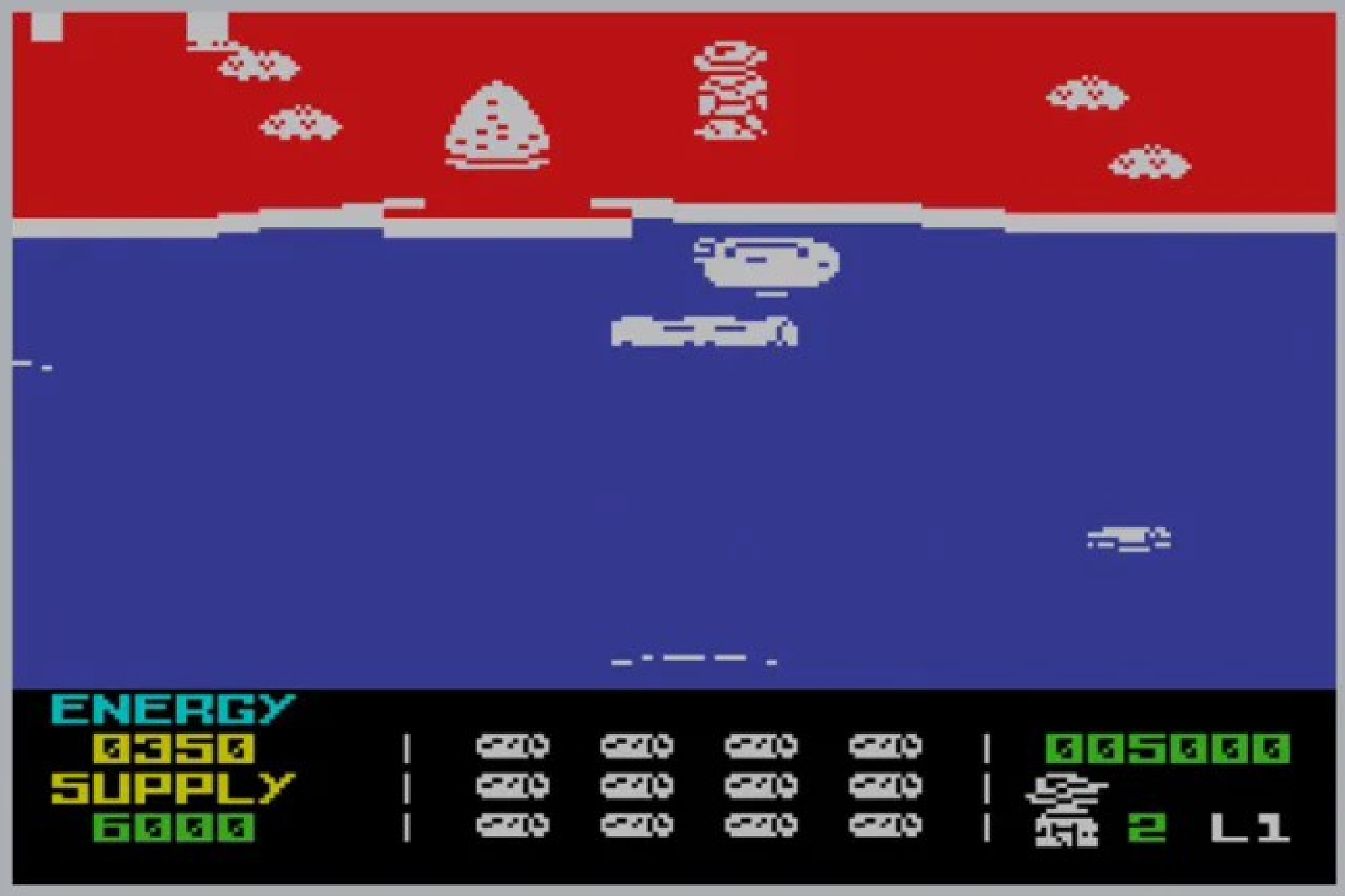
Benefits
Free *Star Wars* action figures and the hours of daylight all to yourself.

PARK RANGER REQUIRED

Job Description
We are currently seeking a Park Ranger to ensure the conservation of our National Park. Duties will include patrolling the lake from inside the park dinghy, keeping a lookout and rescuing any weak swimmers in trouble, and the general upkeep of the shoreline and picnic area from litterbugs.

Required Skills
We are looking for an observant individual, who hates the sight of litter, loves the great outdoors and is not afraid of water.

Benefits
A cooked meal is provided for you every shift, and lifeguard, snake handling and dingy driving training are also offered.



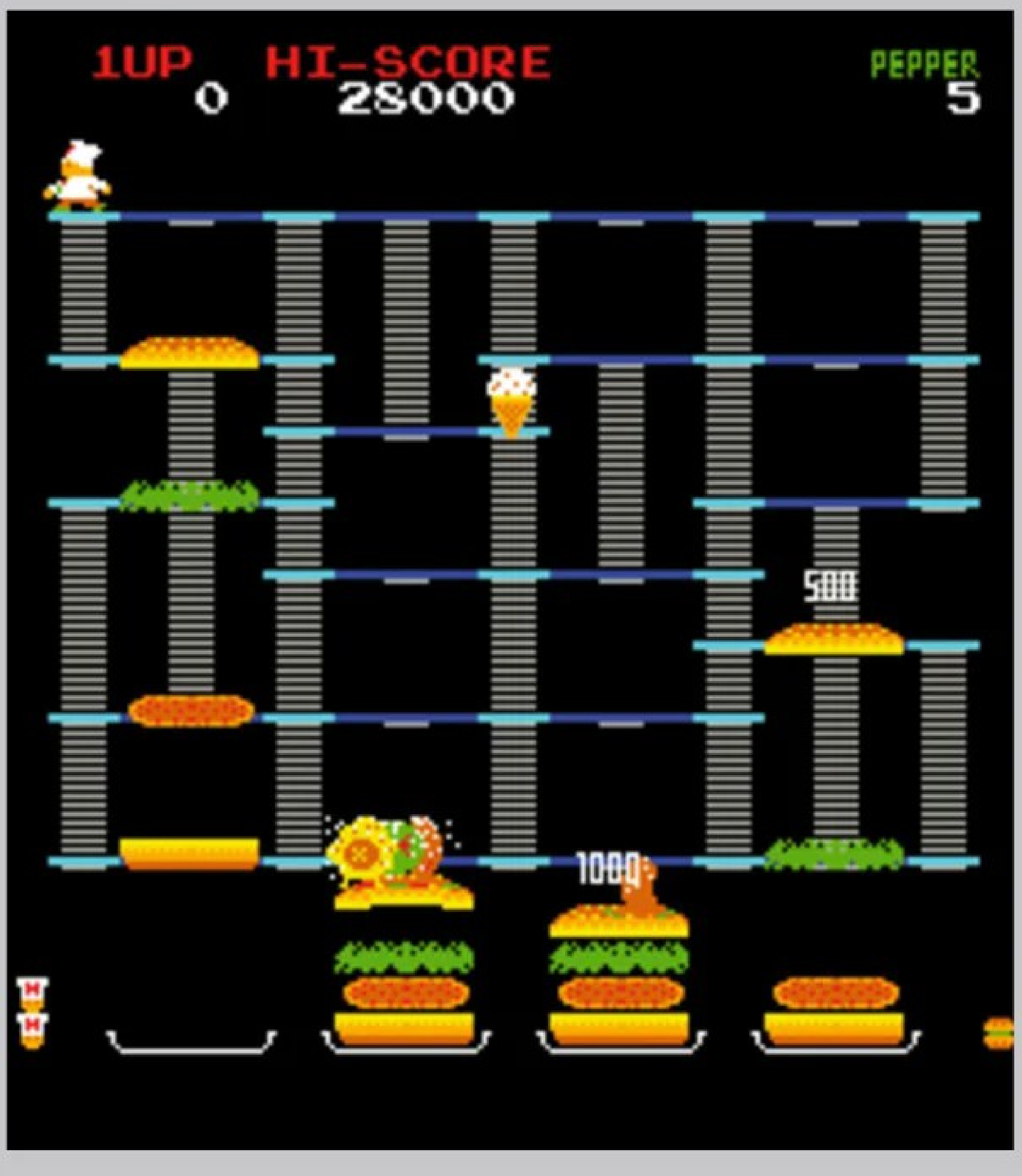
JOB OF THE WEEK

BURGER CHEF WANTED

Job Description
A popular fast-food chain is currently looking to hire an enthusiastic chef to run one of their busiest burger eateries. Duties will include preparing the food area ready for service, cooking beef pates and placing them inside bread buns to a Michelin Star standard.

Required Skills
As head chef you will be expected to prepare and cook the food with your feet, so ensuring great personal hygiene at all times is vital. The ideal candidate will also be physically fit and must not have any food allergies.

Benefits
As well as a competitive bonus scheme, you will also be provided with a free cooked meal during every shift.



BOWSER

King Bowser: Cruel tyrant, loving father, genius dictator, or just a hopeless romantic? We decide to take a much closer look at one of Nintendo's most notorious and memorable villains

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** BOWSER
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** SUPER MARIO BROS
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** BOWSER'S FURY
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** BREATHING FIRE

Mankind's war with the turtles has been long and fierce. First came the turtle, then came man. Not much happened for several million years and then Shigeru Miyamoto plunged the two into a ferocious sea of bitter rivalry. The war began in 1985, when a certain King Bowser, smitten with love for an enemy princess and demented with lust for domination, kidnapped the lovely Princess Peach in an attempt to find both the crown and the heart of the Mushroom Kingdom. And thus began the most infamous clash in videogame history. Of course, Bowser is not just a turtle. As is the case with many Japanese characters, he is actually a hybrid of traditional Eastern mythological creatures and pop culture. His overall body shape is a combination of a Kappa (a gigantic creature with sharp claws, wild hair, and two long horns), a turtle, and any number of movie monsters of the time. His head is based on another Eastern mythological creature popular in Japanese art and theatre: the Oni. This water sprite had a thick shell and scaly, often green skin.

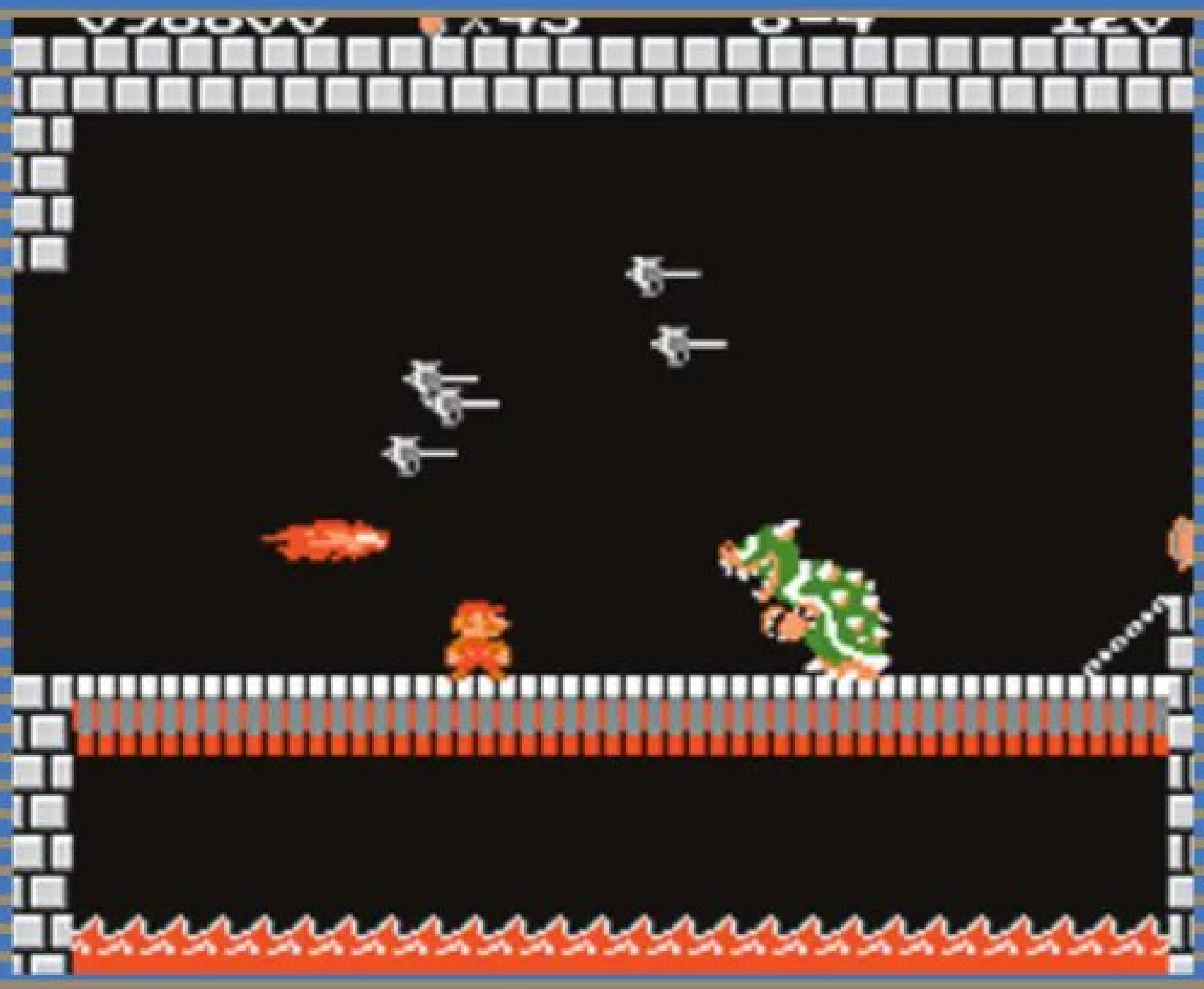
Just as Bowser's visuals are reminiscent of movie monsters, so too is his story, which gleans inspiration from two legendary tales: the great Shakespearean tragedy *Macbeth* and the classic movie *King Kong*. The *Macbeth* influence was brought to life in *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. Adopted by the Koopa magician Kamek as a baby in *Yoshi's Island*, Bowser was told of his destiny to be king and forewarned about two plumbing brothers who would plague his future and forever thwart his plans. And so it was that Bowser was brainwashed in his infancy into attacking Yoshi and Baby Mario at the end of *Yoshi's Island*. The story shares a direct correlation with Macbeth's lust for power and Macduff's threat to the throne.

The second legendary story to influence Bowser is that of *King Kong*. Bowser is undoubtedly smitten with love for Princess Peach, the most adored person in all of the Mushroom Kingdom. However, his love is unrequited and he repeatedly attempts to kidnap the princess only to be defeated. Where *King Kong*'s simplicity and innocence demands sympathy, Bowser, on the surface, appears to be an evil tyrant demented by thoughts of domination. Search deeper, however, and it's immediately clear why he is so angry. Bowser is the single father of eight children (Queen Clawdia was once revealed as the mother in *Nintendo Power*, but she has never appeared in a game); he is a powerful king belittled by an apparently fatherless princess who therefore has no evidential claim to the throne; he is completely infatuated with Princess Peach, to the extent that he has, so far, kidnapped her more than ten times and been constantly trounced by a plumber who risks his life for a woman who only ever offers him cake as a reward. And finally, Bowser is the only major character in a *Mario* game yet to be given his own videogame. Yeah, Bowser is mad and with good reason, too.

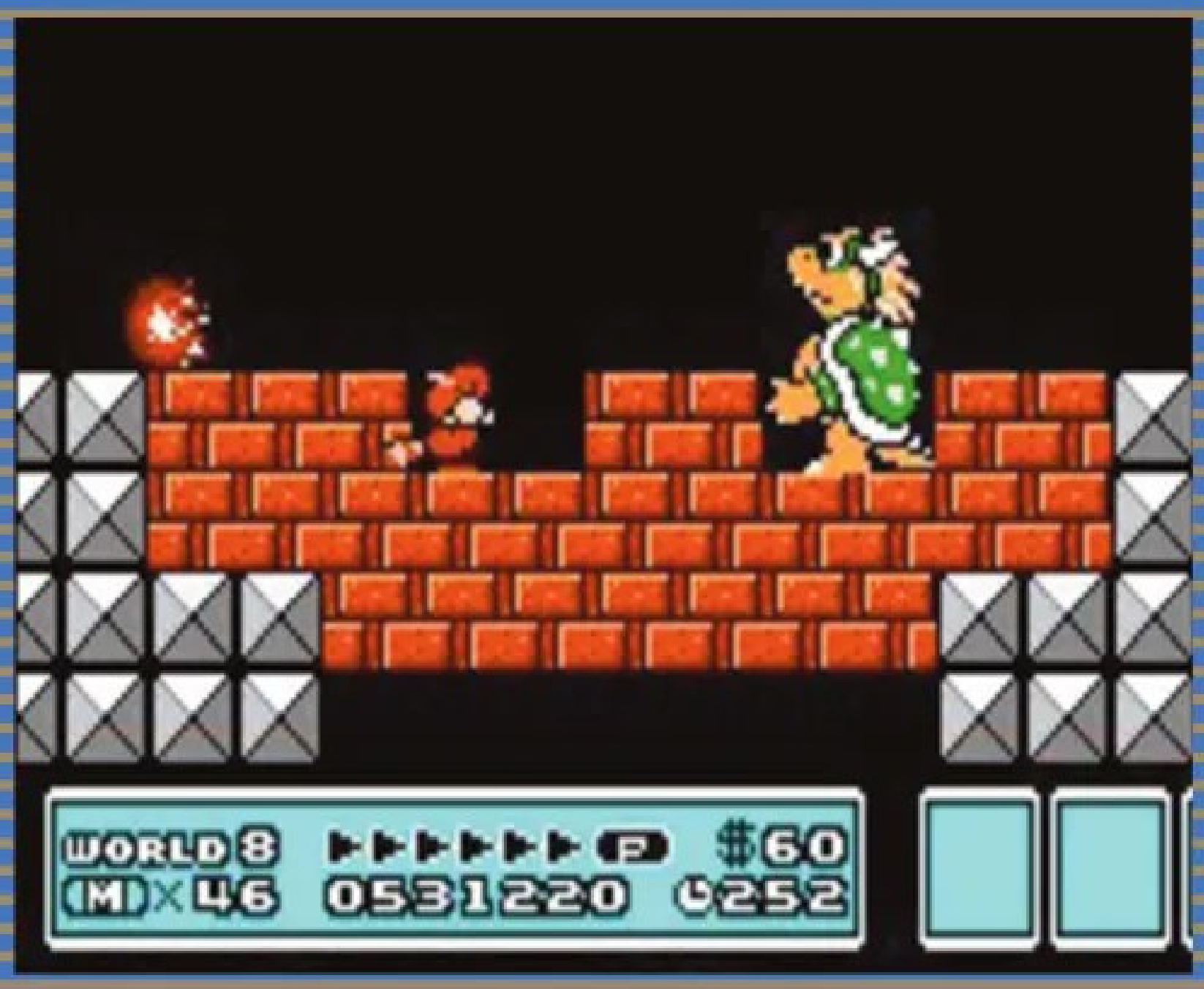
Holding the throne of Koopas just doesn't demand respect these days. Thankfully, Bowser is able to put his concerns aside while playing sports, during which time he also seems to get along with Mario, making you wonder whether they might be best friends were it not for the female charms of a certain princess. Brought under the spotlight, the vicious monster that wants to rule the kingdom is actually just a naive romantic.

Bowser has gone through several stages of anger management since his early days, successfully finding an outlet for his rage in *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*, thanks to the genre's gift of allowing for deep character work. *Legend Of The Seven Stars* was the first of three instances when Bowser took on the role of antihero, reluctantly joining forces with Mario to regain control of his kingdom from Smithy. The RPG genre also gave Bowser a comedic flair with which to complement his bad-ass attitude – a character trait that remains with the king to this day. Mario games may not be renowned for their humour, but the Game Boy Advance title *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga* successfully capitalised on what *Legend Of The Seven Stars* had set up by having Bowser possessed by the evil witch Cackletta, resulting in the hilarious and applause-worthy originality of Bowletta. Thanks to the therapy of role-playing games, Bowser is now happy to chill out and even stop kidnapping people whenever the mood takes him. Whether he's relaxing with his feet up in the hot tub with Bowser Jr in *Super Mario Sunshine*, or tearing up the racetrack in *Mario Kart*, Bowser has proved that even evil tyrants are entitled to a good rest and a bit of a giggle now and then. Let that be a lesson to any would-be evil dictators out there. ✱

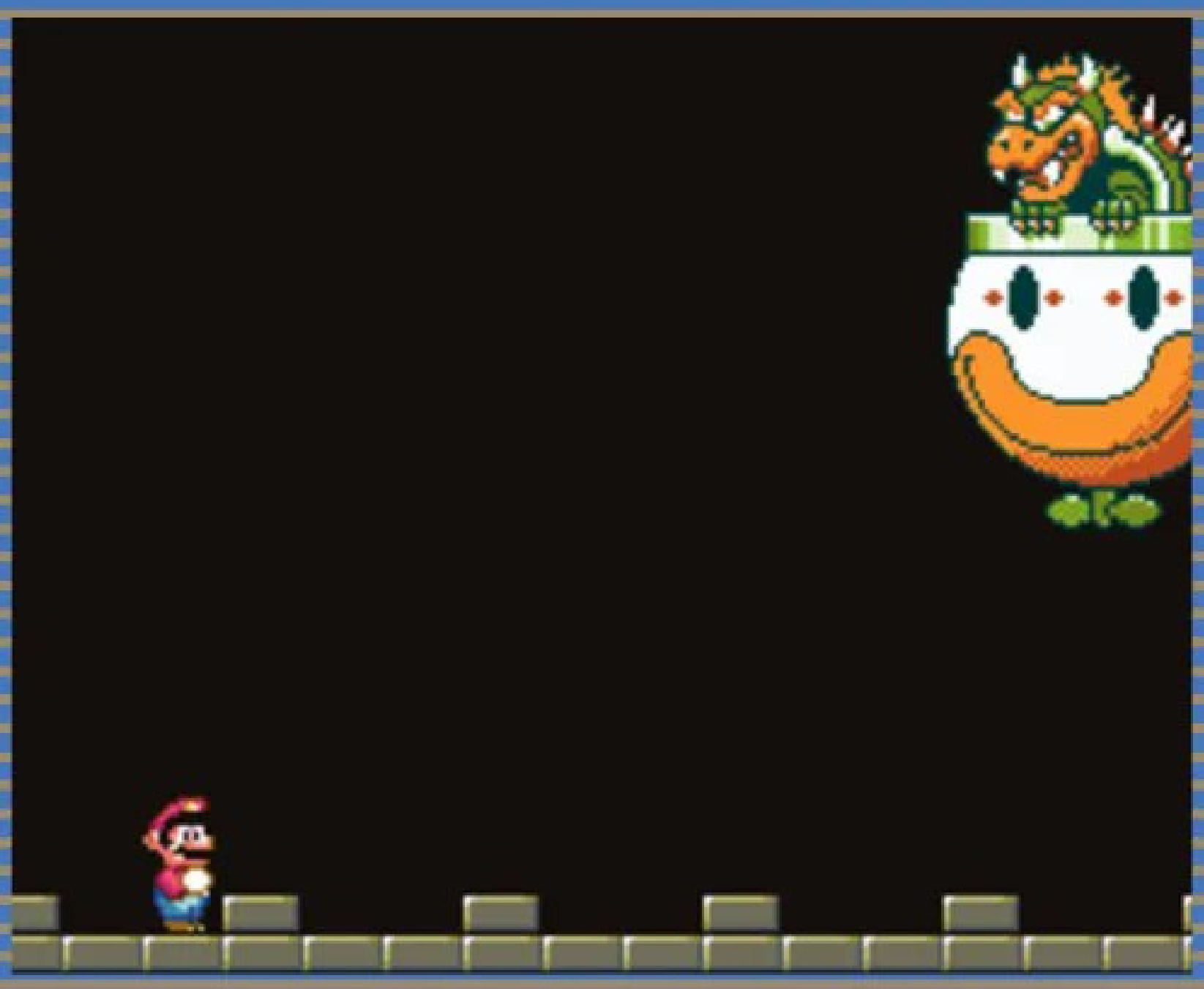
> MAGIC MOMENTS



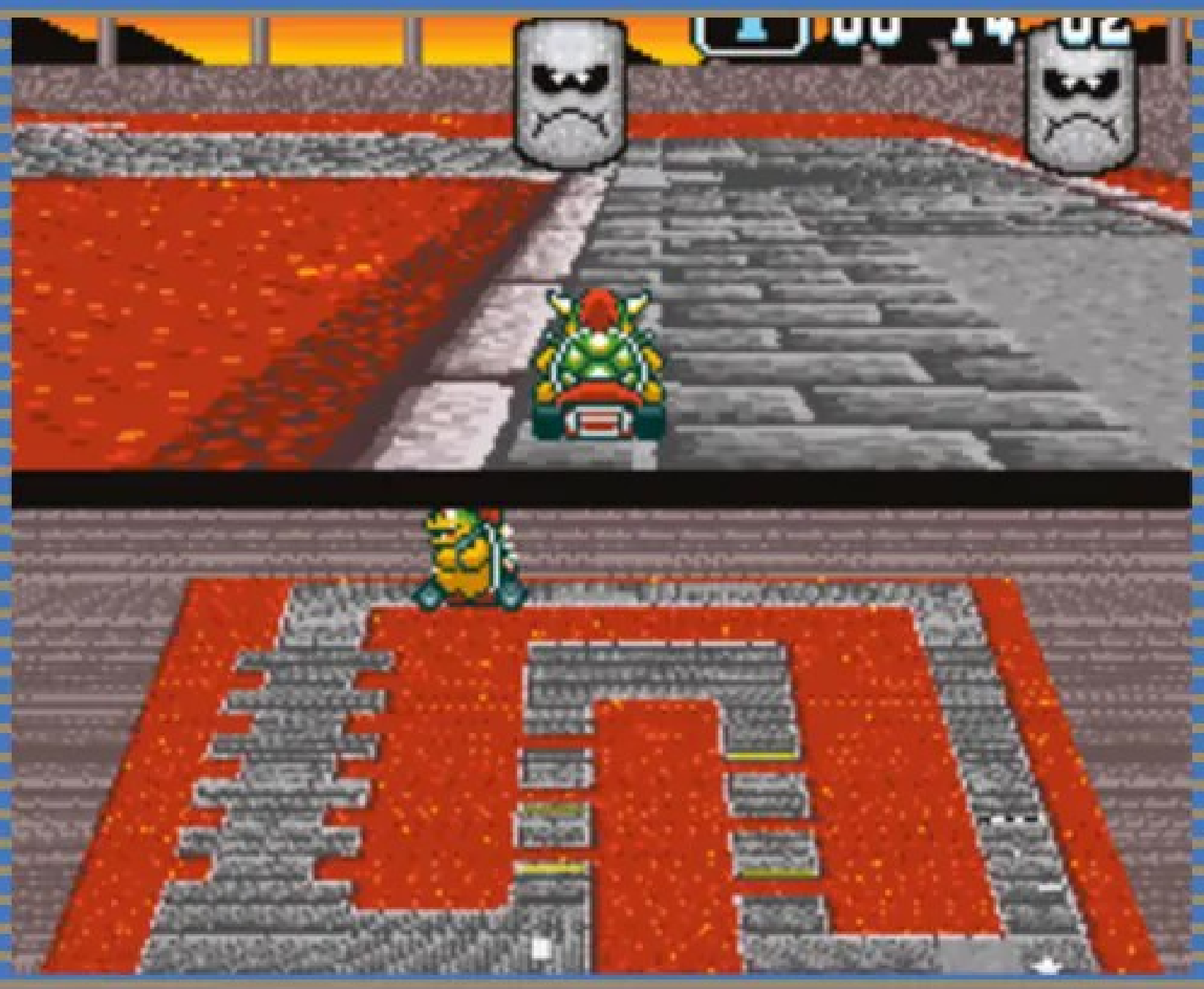
■ Bowser looks happy breathing fire. Who'd have thought flames would be his downfall?



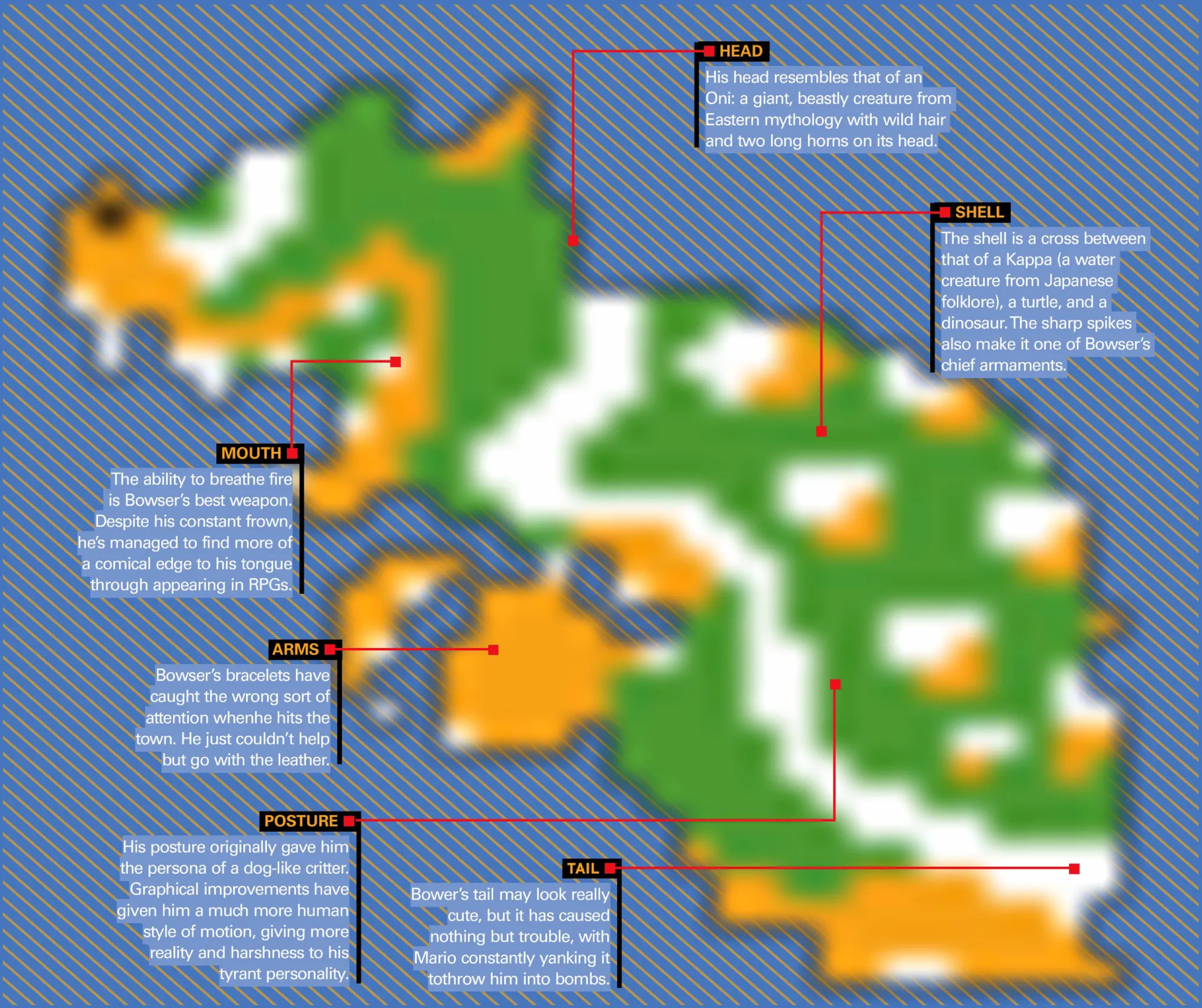
■ The graphical improvements of *Mario 3* gave Bowser his red mane and less of a puppy-dog feel.



■ This is the Koopa Clown Car that later featured in the cartoon episode Send In The Clown.



■ It's reassuring to know that those *Mario Kart* Thwomps know who's king.



HEAD
His head resembles that of an Oni: a giant, beastly creature from Eastern mythology with wild hair and two long horns on its head.

SHELL
The shell is a cross between that of a Kappa (a water creature from Japanese folklore), a turtle, and a dinosaur. The sharp spikes also make it one of Bowser's chief armaments.

MOUTH
The ability to breathe fire is Bowser's best weapon. Despite his constant frown, he's managed to find more of a comical edge to his tongue through appearing in RPGs.

ARMS
Bowser's bracelets have caught the wrong sort of attention whenhe hits the town. He just couldn't help but go with the leather.

POSTURE
His posture originally gave him the persona of a dog-like critter. Graphical improvements have given him a much more human style of motion, giving more reality and harshness to his tyrant personality.

TAIL
Bower's tail may look really cute, but it has caused nothing but trouble, with Mario constantly yanking it tothrow him into bombs.

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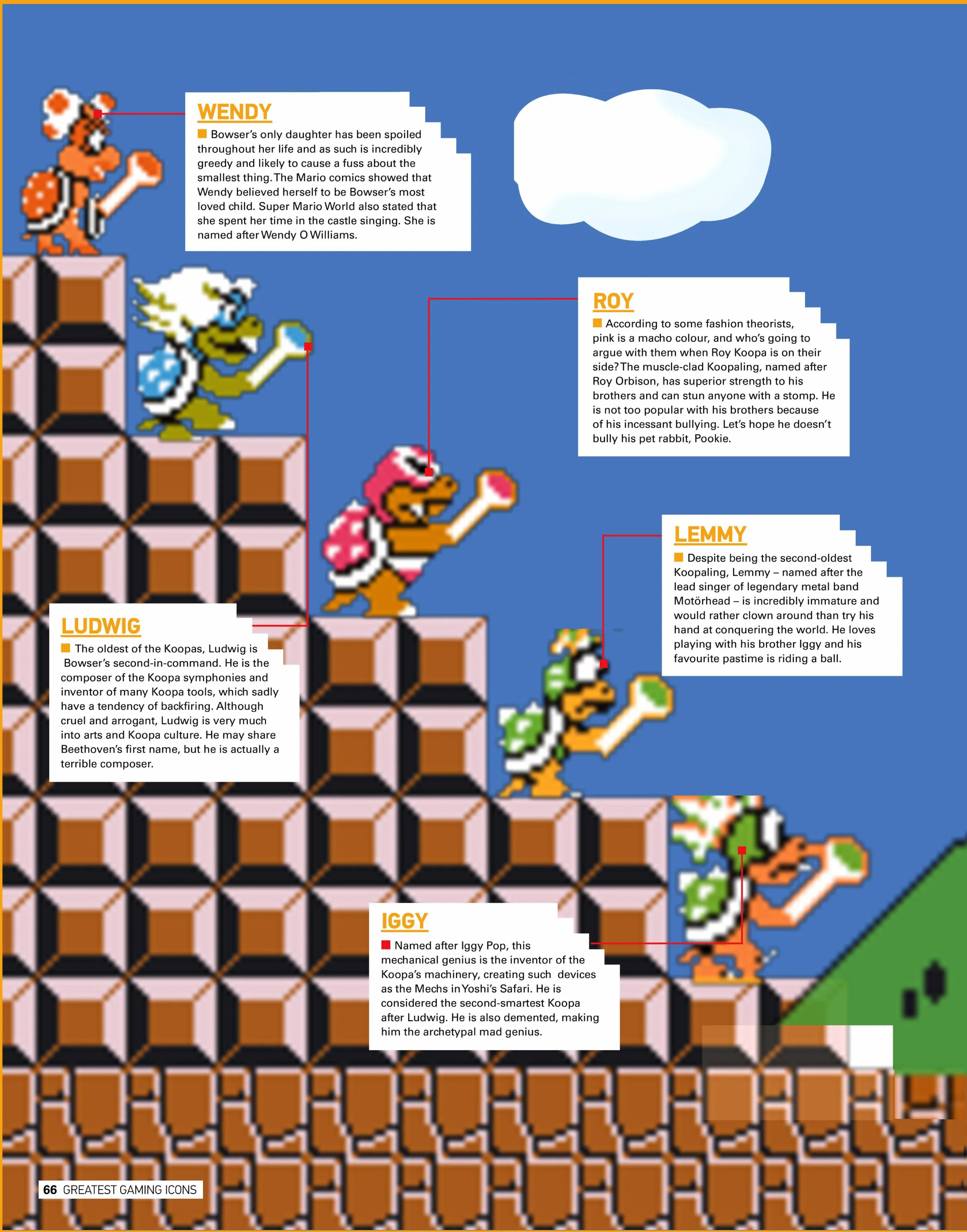
■ *Yoshi Safari* might not have been great, but look how cute Bowser is.

■ The Mario RPGs allowed for a much greater depth of character.

■ Bowser found his true heroism – or rather anti-heroism – in *Superstar Saga*.

"THE BABIES ARE MINE!"

■ *Yoshi's Island* introduced Baby Bowser and began the man/turtle war (chronologically).



WENDY

Bowser's only daughter has been spoiled throughout her life and as such is incredibly greedy and likely to cause a fuss about the smallest thing. The Mario comics showed that Wendy believed herself to be Bowser's most loved child. Super Mario World also stated that she spent her time in the castle singing. She is named after Wendy O Williams.

ROY

According to some fashion theorists, pink is a macho colour, and who's going to argue with them when Roy Koopa is on their side? The muscle-clad Koopaling, named after Roy Orbison, has superior strength to his brothers and can stun anyone with a stomp. He is not too popular with his brothers because of his incessant bullying. Let's hope he doesn't bully his pet rabbit, Pookie.

LEMMY

Despite being the second-oldest Koopaling, Lemmy – named after the lead singer of legendary metal band Motörhead – is incredibly immature and would rather clown around than try his hand at conquering the world. He loves playing with his brother Iggy and his favourite pastime is riding a ball.

LUDWIG

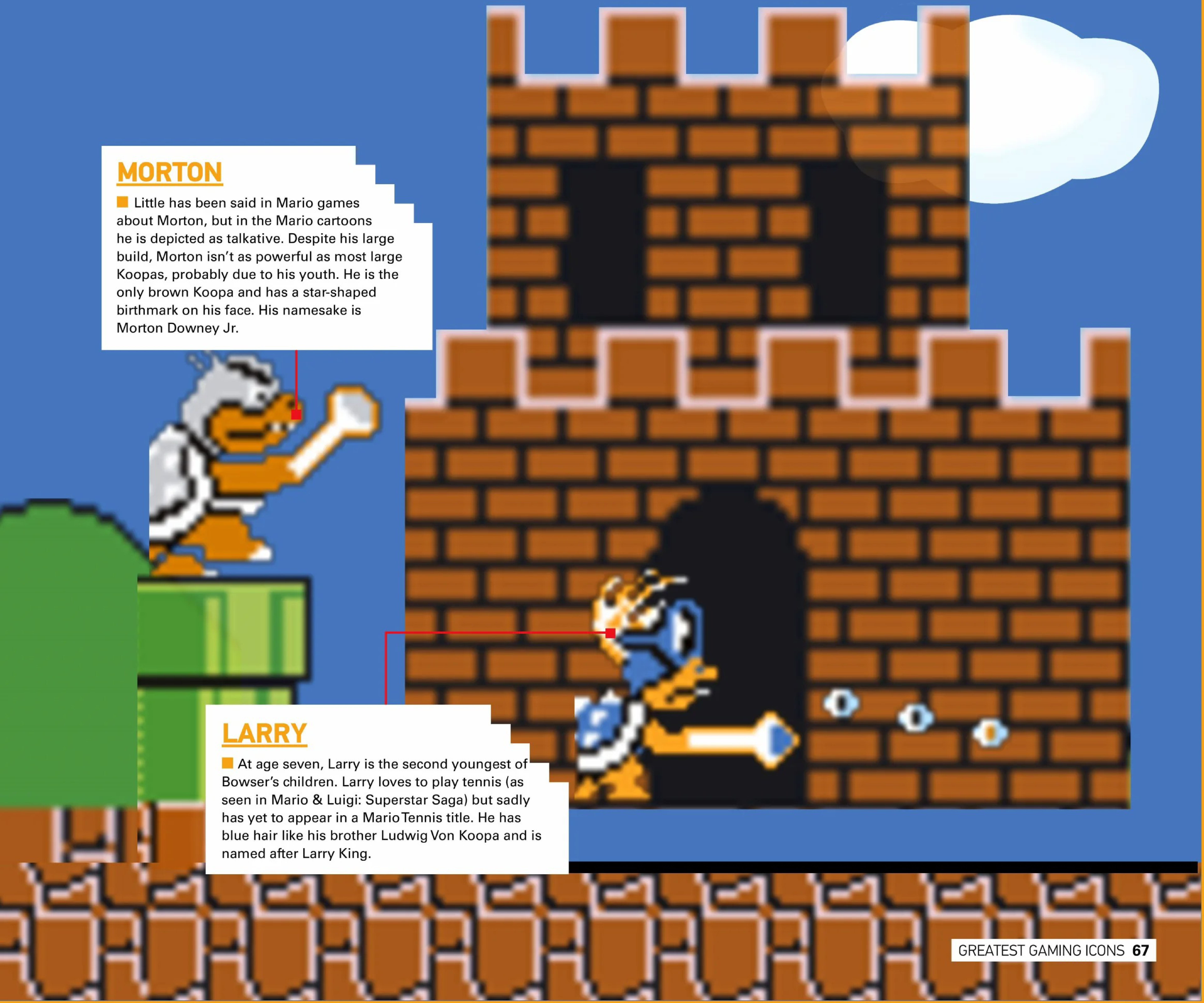
The oldest of the Koopas, Ludwig is Bowser's second-in-command. He is the composer of the Koopa symphonies and inventor of many Koopa tools, which sadly have a tendency of backfiring. Although cruel and arrogant, Ludwig is very much into arts and Koopa culture. He may share Beethoven's first name, but he is actually a terrible composer.

IGGY

Named after Iggy Pop, this mechanical genius is the inventor of the Koopa's machinery, creating such devices as the Mechs in Yoshi's Safari. He is considered the second-smartest Koopa after Ludwig. He is also demented, making him the archetypal mad genius.

MEET THE KOOPAS

Before their father showed them the beauty of airships, Bowser's brood played happily with their toys in the castle. Although it seems cruel for a father to use his children as pawns in his personal game of chess, the Koopalings are no ordinary kids. Making their debut in *Super Mario Bros 3,* when they stole the magic wands from the kings of Mushroom Kingdom, they were then each given a castle to defend in Dinosaur Land in *Super Mario World.* Though they gained fame from appearing in games like *Mario Is Missing!, Yoshi's Safari, Hotel Mario,* and *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, it's away from the gaming canon that the Koopalings found their mainstay. Their first appearance outside videogames was in the Japanese-only *Super Mario Amada* series. They also appeared in TV show *The Adventures Of Super Mario Bros 3,* but were sadly misrepresented because the Japanese version of *SMB3,* which the creator was referencing, did not state their names. And so it was that Lemmy, Iggy, Roy, and co became Bully, Kooky, Kootie, Pie, Big Mouth, Cheatsy, and Hip Hop. Not only were the names incorrect, but their personalities were also quite unlike their in-game personas. The show's creator incurred the wrath of King Bowser for such defamation. With such a busy cinematic schedule, it's no wonder the Koopalings were unable to make it into *Super Princess Peach*.



MORTON

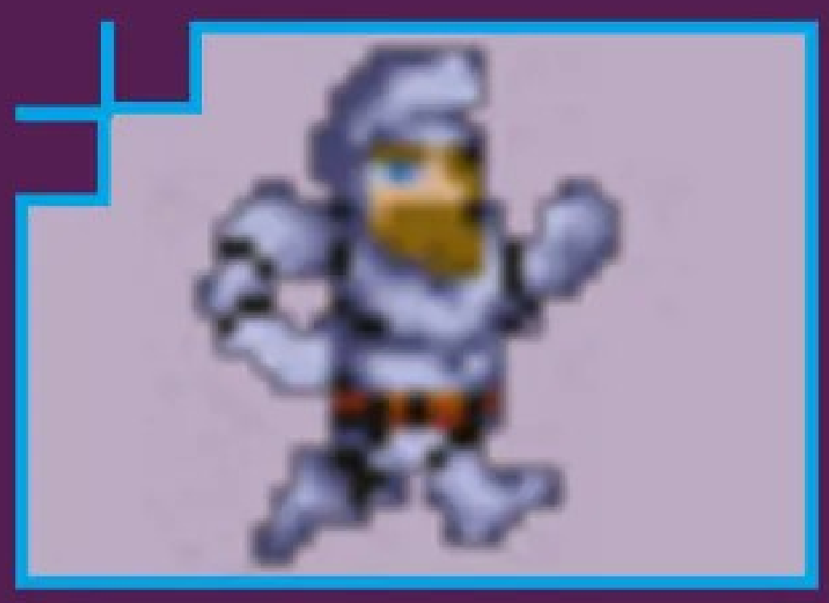
Little has been said in Mario games about Morton, but in the Mario cartoons he is depicted as talkative. Despite his large build, Morton isn't as powerful as most large Koopas, probably due to his youth. He is the only brown Koopa and has a star-shaped birthmark on his face. His namesake is Morton Downey Jr.

LARRY

At age seven, Larry is the second youngest of Bowser's children. Larry loves to play tennis (as seen in Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga) but sadly has yet to appear in a Mario Tennis title. He has blue hair like his brother Ludwig Von Koopa and is named after Larry King.

SIR ARTHUR

Ghosts 'N' Goblins is one of the most revered series. It's also one of the most reviled. We decided to take a closer look to find out why



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** SIR ARTHUR
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS: GOLD KNIGHTS
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** WEARING FUNKY PANTS

Maddening, frustrating, twitchy, and testing are among the many ways to describe Capcom's supernatural and super-difficult platform series. Breaking the pads and patience of many fortuitous gamers, the *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* franchise comprises some of the most arduous games you're ever likely to encounter.

Sir Arthur, the hirsute protagonist of *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, is widely regarded as the most unfortunate hero ever to embark on a misadventure. His creator, Tokuro Fujiwara, admits that the masochistic difficulty spikes of Arthur's life were a product of his being born in the cash-gorging brothels of videogame arcades. In the Eighties heyday of arcade gaming, unthinkable difficulty and a solid challenge proved an irresistible draw.

This knight's tale of utter woe begins when a winged demon appears and kidnaps Prin Prin, teleporting her to the Ghoul Realm. The brave knight pursues the kidnapped woman across several levels of ghoulish terrain, and, as if to add to the challenge, is kitted out in a particularly ineffective suit of armour – Arthur can take a maximum of two hits before biting the dust. The first blow will knock away his silver plating, leaving him to continue his quest in those iconic heart-print boxers, and these ridiculous under garments can absorb just one more strike before our hero leaps into the air in a blaze of bones.

In this super-unnatural world, the rules of conventional gameplay are eschewed. Power ups are spitefully booby-trapped by an evil sorcerer, and even when they're not they can still prove detrimental to your progress. In fact, the most effective weapon in the game, the lance, is the one you're armed with from the very beginning. The spear allows Arthur to keep a safe distance when attacking enemies, which is useful because he isn't the most agile knight. Perhaps in an effort to convey the restrictions of his cumbersome suit, Arthur's movements are overly awkward.

> **"Since leaping onto arcade screens, Arthur's appearance hasn't evolved"**

Since leaping onto arcade screens in 1985, Arthur's appearance hasn't evolved significantly. While the switch to Capcom's CPS-1 board for the sequel, *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, meant that the detail and hues of the hellish stages were ramped up, Arthur himself received little tweaking. The most noticeable transformation occurred in his actions. In the second game, he could lance things vertically and horizontally. By holding down the fire button, *R-Type* style, the gold suit of armour even allowed him to deliver a concentrated spell attack that would clear the screen of enemies.

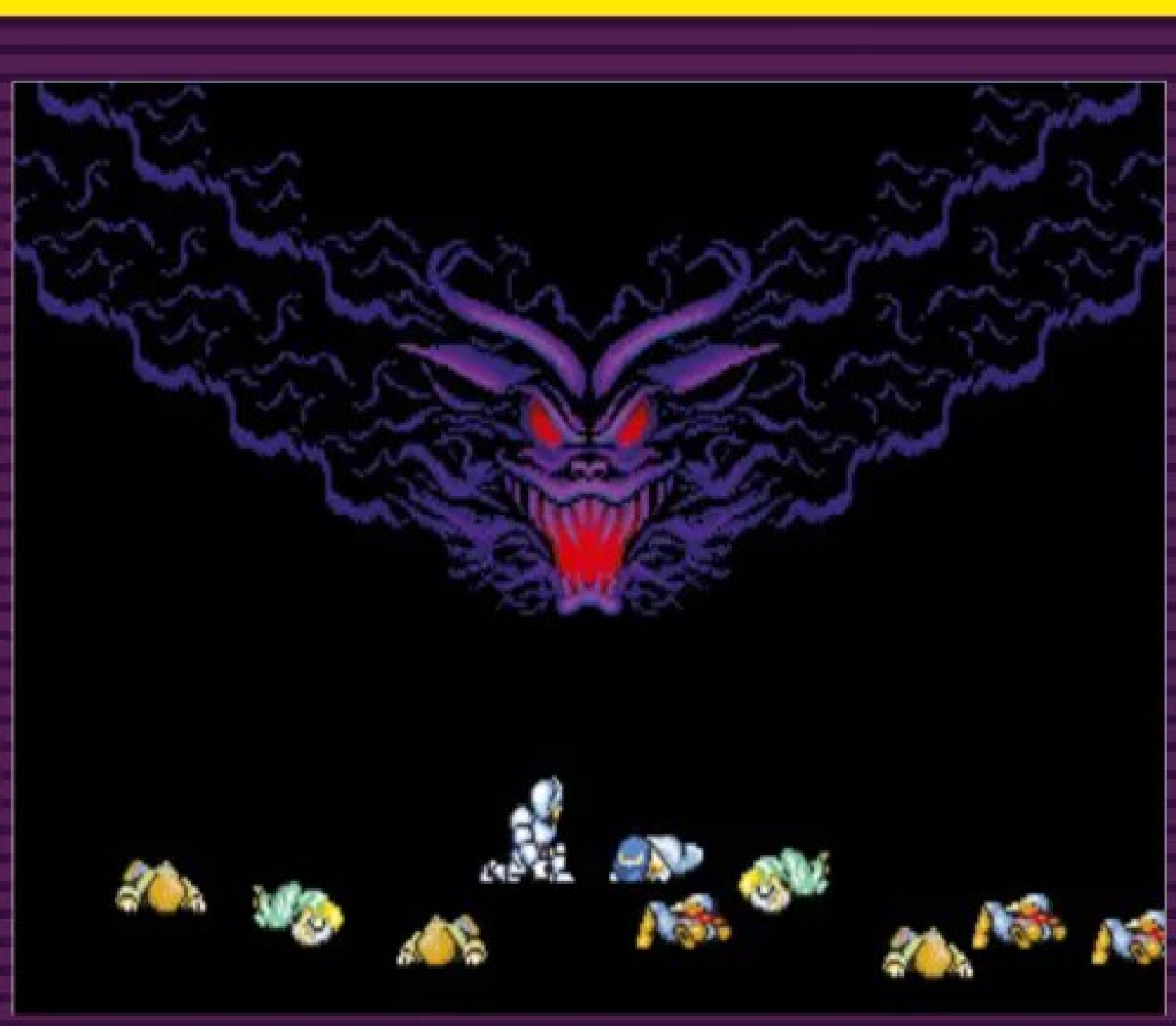
The release of *Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* on Super Nintendo then introduced the popular double-jump to Arthur's move repertoire. Crucially, this gave us a little more airborne control, allowing us to back out of a jump should a cadaver appear in his landing zone. The SNES caper also introduced another suit upgrade – the green armour handily replaced Arthur's weapon with a more powerful variation.

The main character overhaul arrived with the release of *Ultimate Ghosts 'N' Goblins* on PSP. The third portable outing for our hero – he's appeared on GBA in the portable edition of the SNES game and in a monochrome adventure on the Wonderswan – saw the development reins handed back to Arthur's originator, Fujiwara, after a brief hiatus from heading the series. The PSP title saw Arthur rebuilt in polygons, benefiting from a dash and ledge-grab ability and the power of flight with the help of a power-up shield.

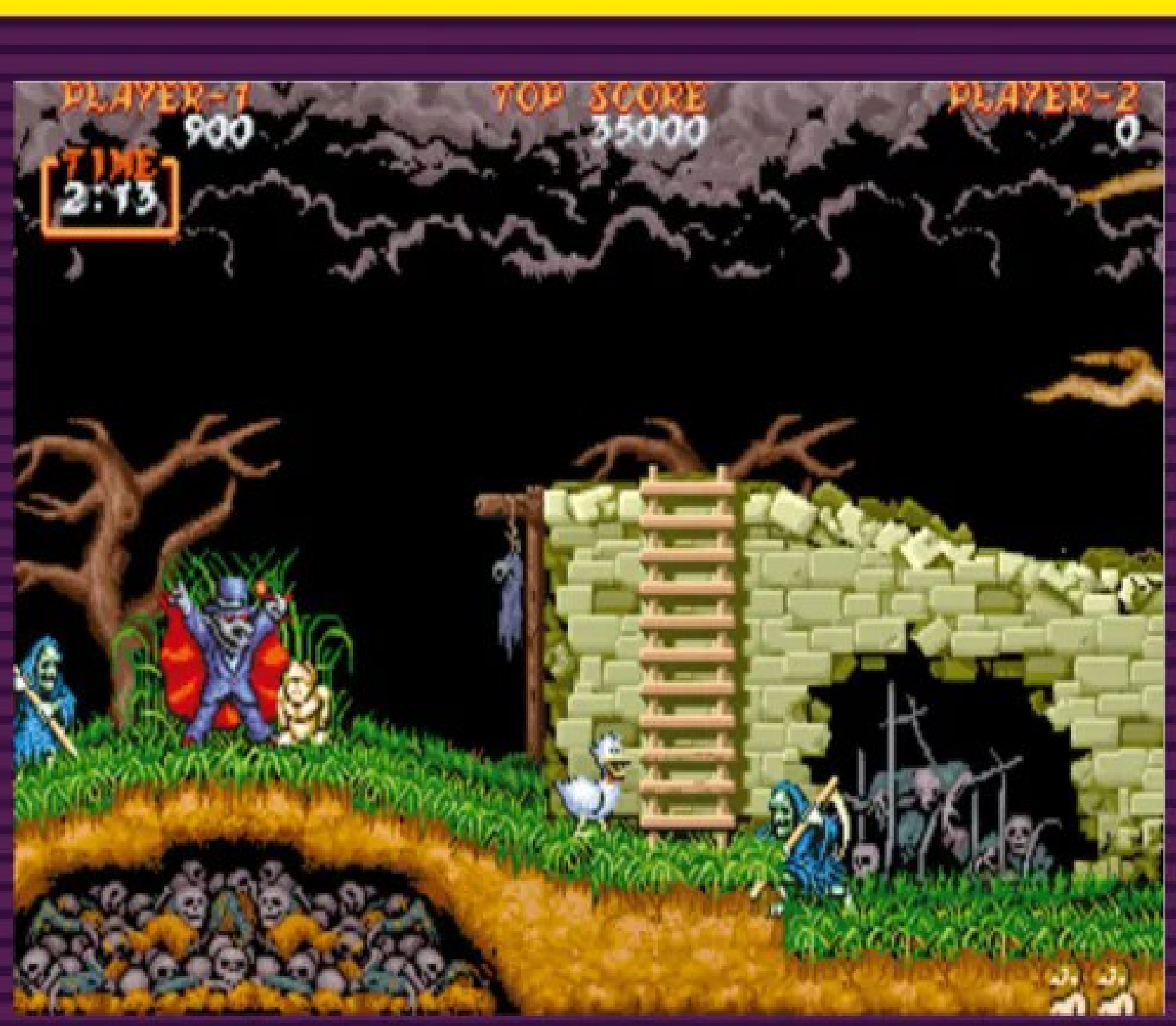
Arthur's popularity has enabled him to make a few appearances outside the main *GNG* canon. The most bizarre cameos include his appearances as a boss in the DC shooter *Cannon Spike* and as a playable character in Capcom's fighting crossover game *Marvel Vs Capcom: Infinite*.

Adventures with Arthur are unforgettable. Sure, they're unfairly challenging, but for some therein lies their appeal. And although Arthur's quests often end prematurely, the periods between the trials and tribulations are memorable… for all the right reasons. ✱

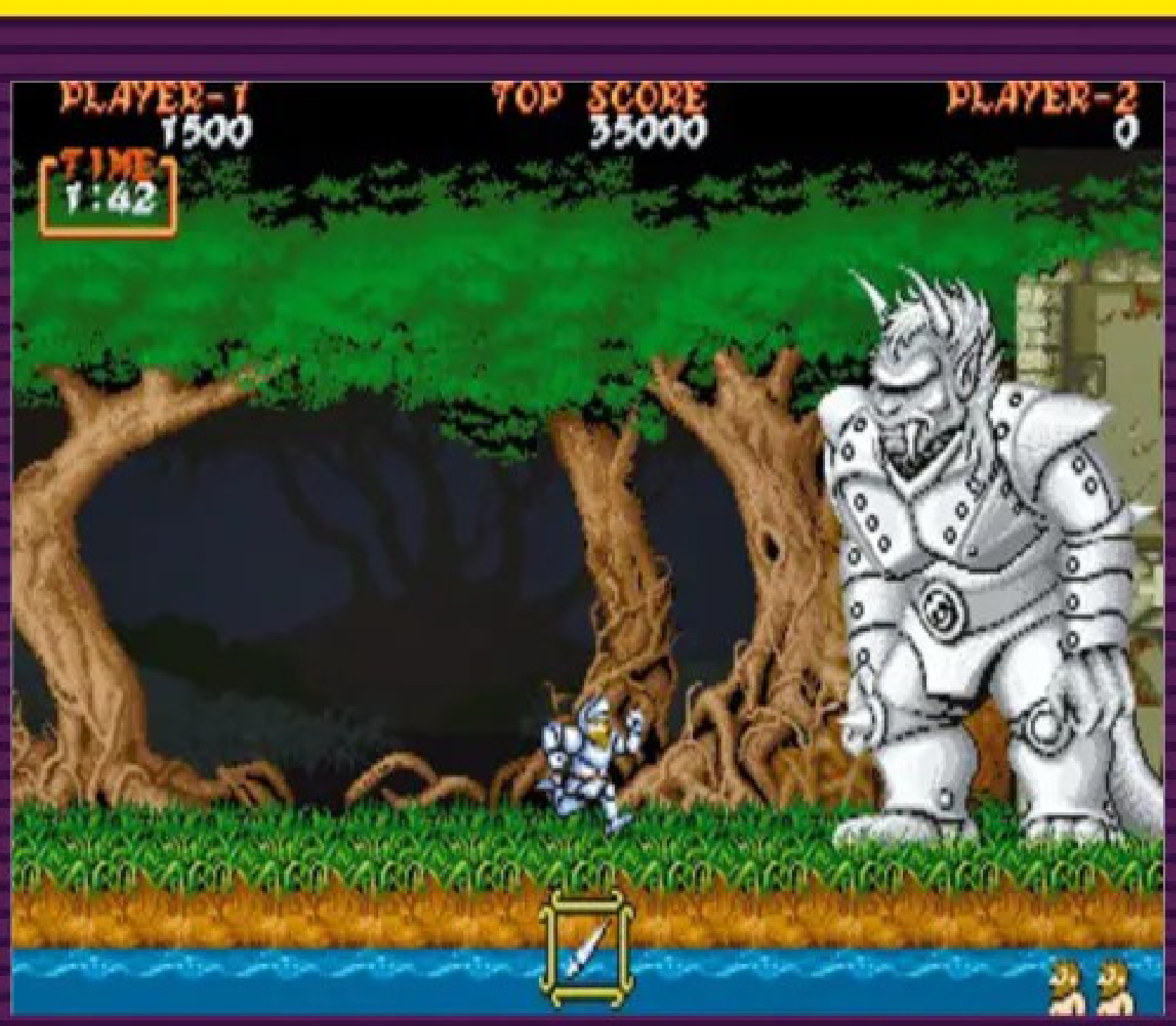
> MAGIC MOMENTS



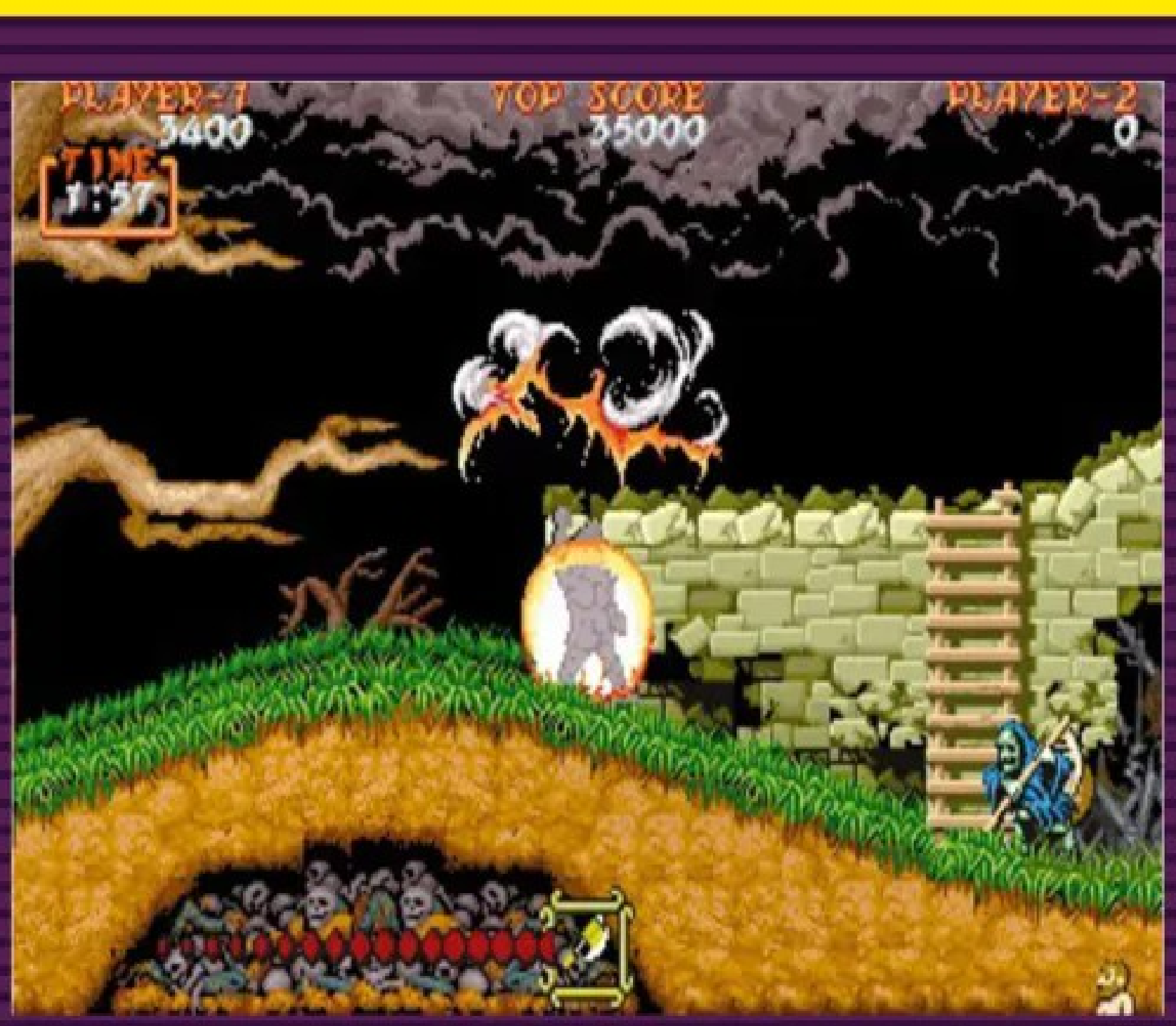
■ In the intro to *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, we see Arthur's horse massacred by lightning bolts. Poor thing.



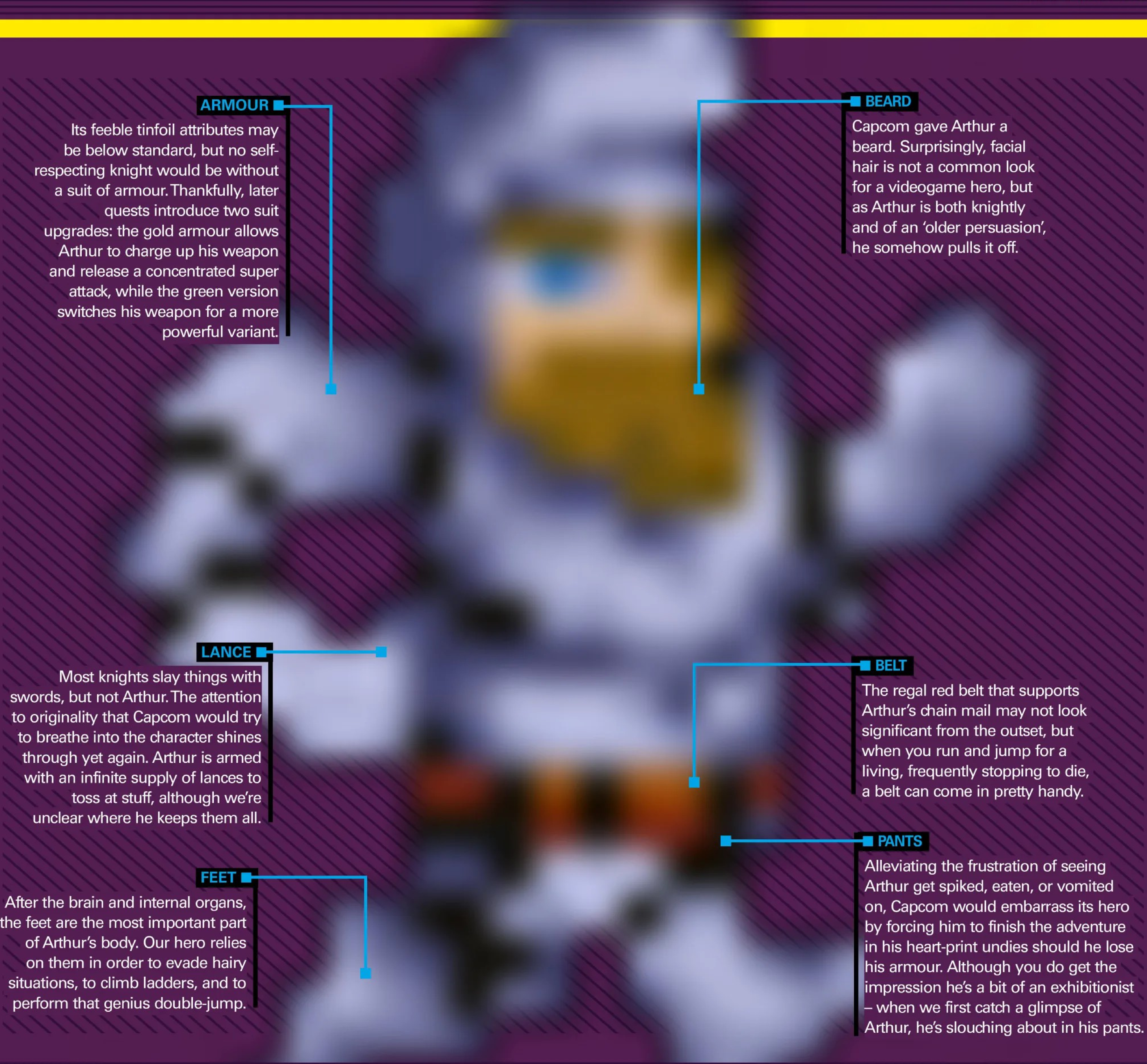
■ The wizard's spells can hinder you. So watch out, you might find yourself turned into a duck.



■ This boss looks like a huge metal statue, but he soon pulls his own head off and causes trouble.



■ If you're holding the golden axe when you pick up the golden armour, your special gets enhanced.



ARMOUR

Its feeble tinfoil attributes may be below standard, but no self-respecting knight would be without a suit of armour. Thankfully, later quests introduce two suit upgrades: the gold armour allows Arthur to charge up his weapon and release a concentrated super attack, while the green version switches his weapon for a more powerful variant.

BEARD

Capcom gave Arthur a beard. Surprisingly, facial hair is not a common look for a videogame hero, but as Arthur is both knightly and of an 'older persuasion', he somehow pulls it off.

LANCE

Most knights slay things with swords, but not Arthur. The attention to originality that Capcom would try to breathe into the character shines through yet again. Arthur is armed with an infinite supply of lances to toss at stuff, although we're unclear where he keeps them all.

BELT

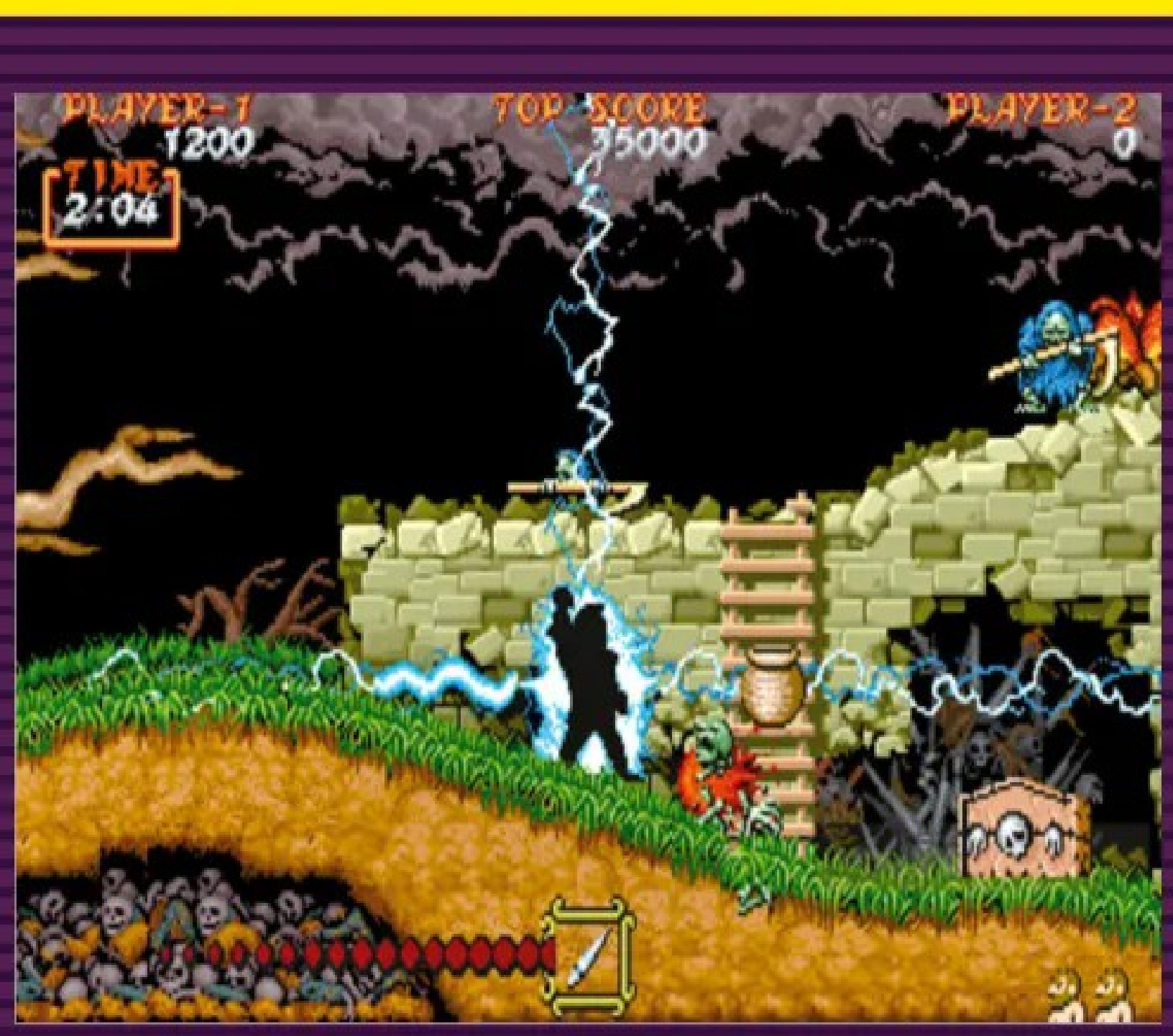
The regal red belt that supports Arthur's chain mail may not look significant from the outset, but when you run and jump for a living, frequently stopping to die, a belt can come in pretty handy.

PANTS

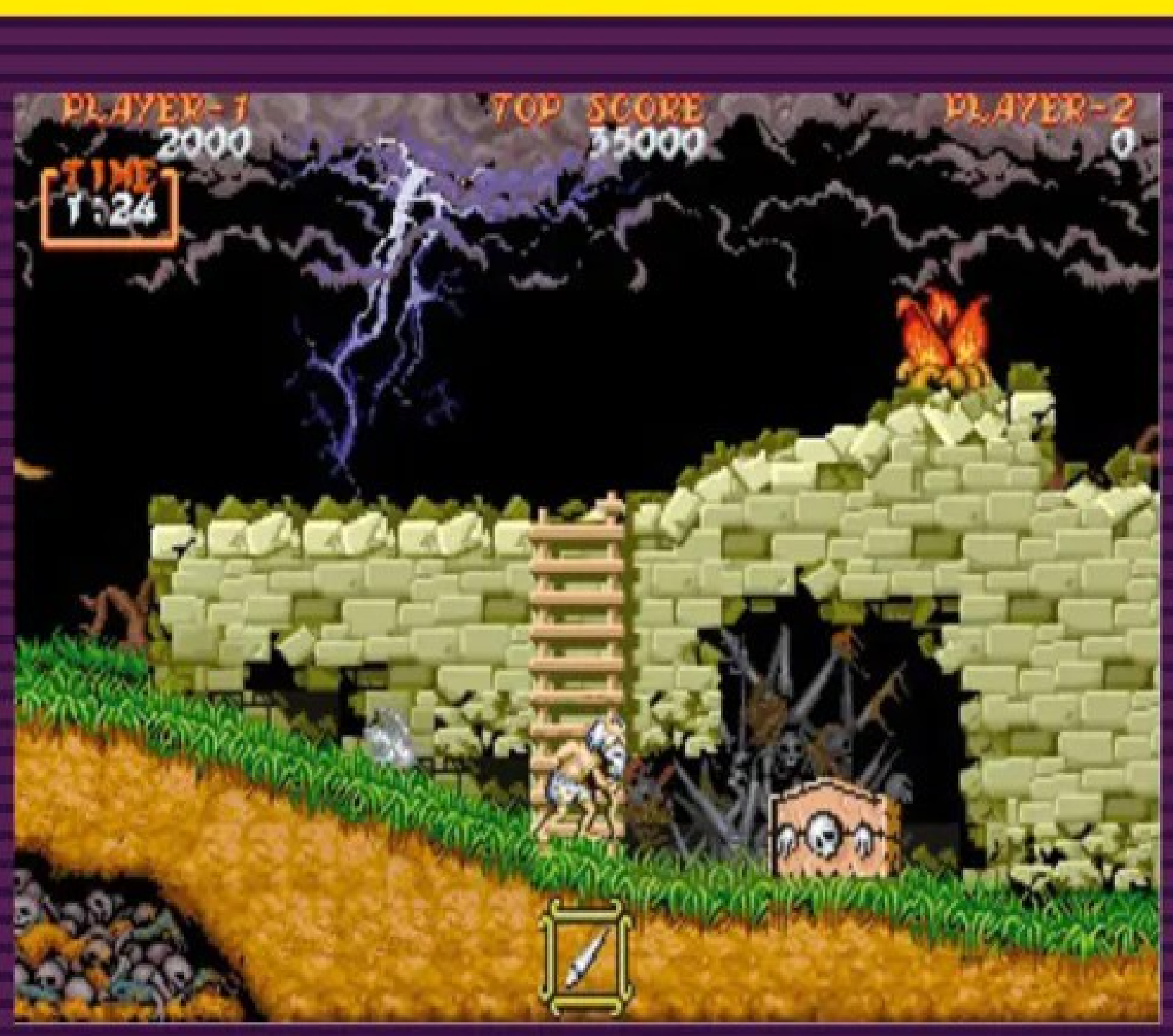
Alleviating the frustration of seeing Arthur get spiked, eaten, or vomited on, Capcom would embarrass its hero by forcing him to finish the adventure in his heart-print undies should he lose his armour. Although you do get the impression he's a bit of an exhibitionist – when we first catch a glimpse of Arthur, he's slouching about in his pants.

FEET

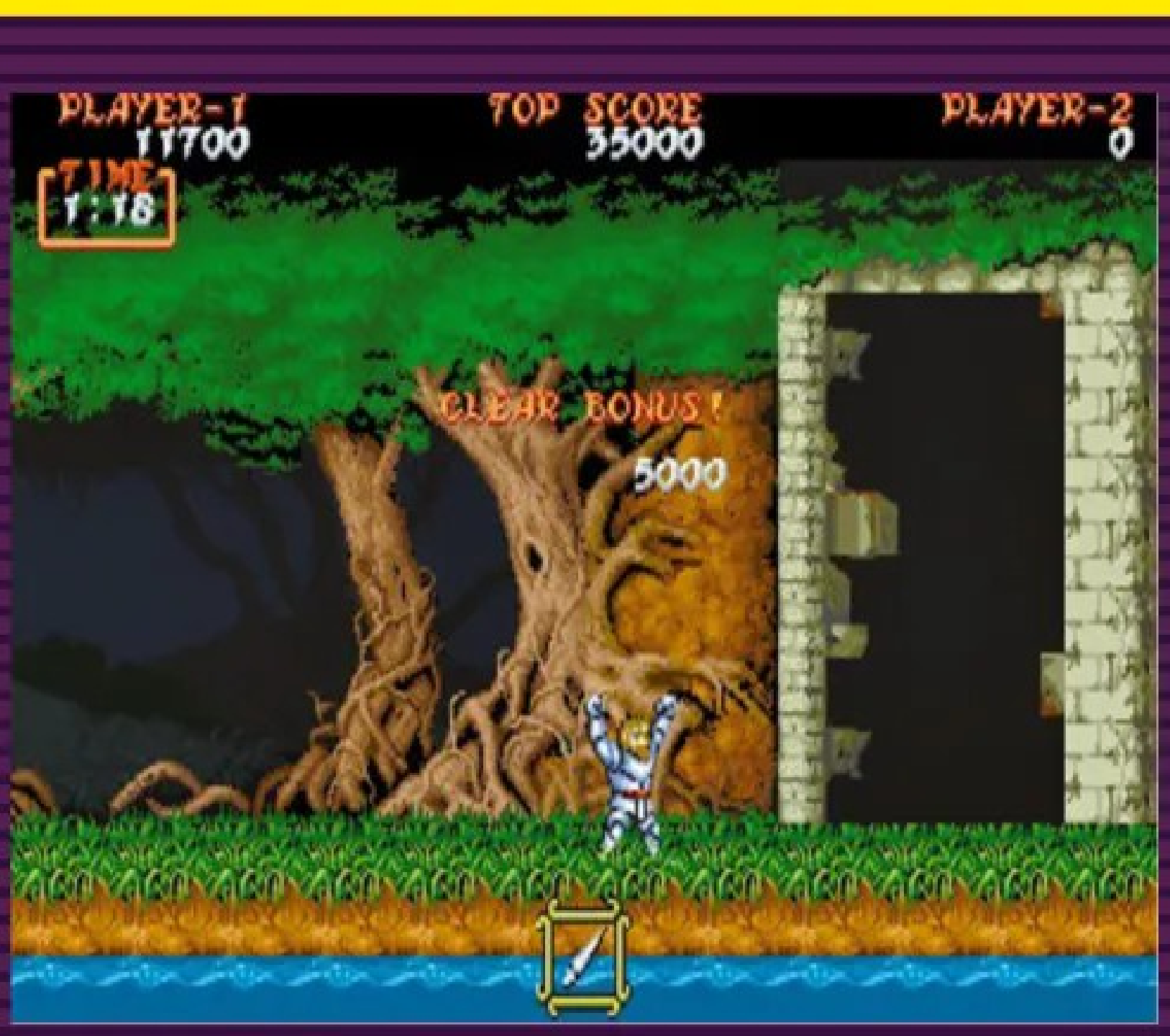
After the brain and internal organs, the feet are the most important part of Arthur's body. Our hero relies on them in order to evade hairy situations, to climb ladders, and to perform that genius double-jump.



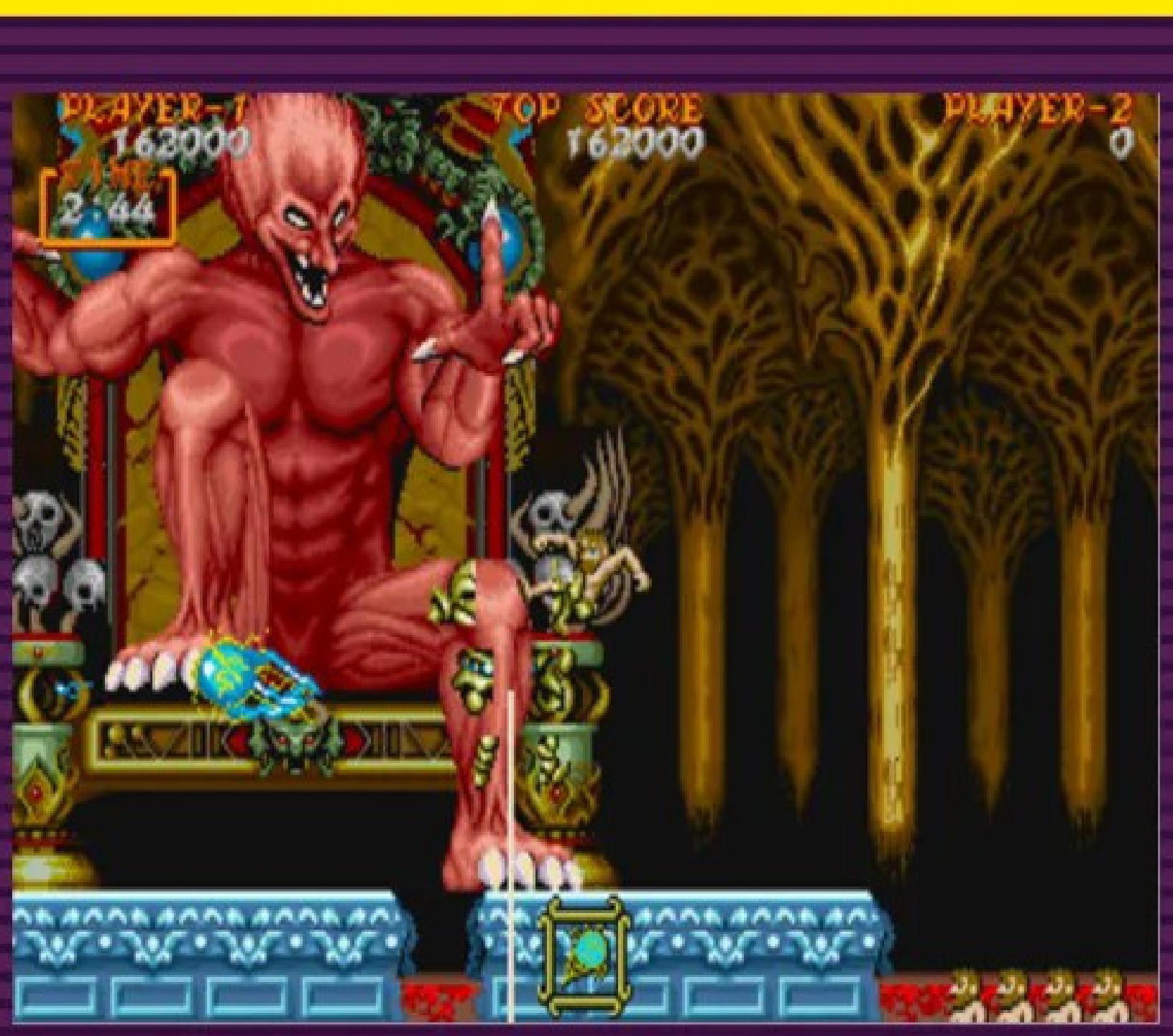
■ Acquire the gold armour while using the lance and Arthur's special attack becomes shocking.



■ Poor old Arthur. There he was minding his own business and he gets turned into an old man.



■ The first stage is always the longest, but with perseverance you'll beat it. Careful, it gets harder.

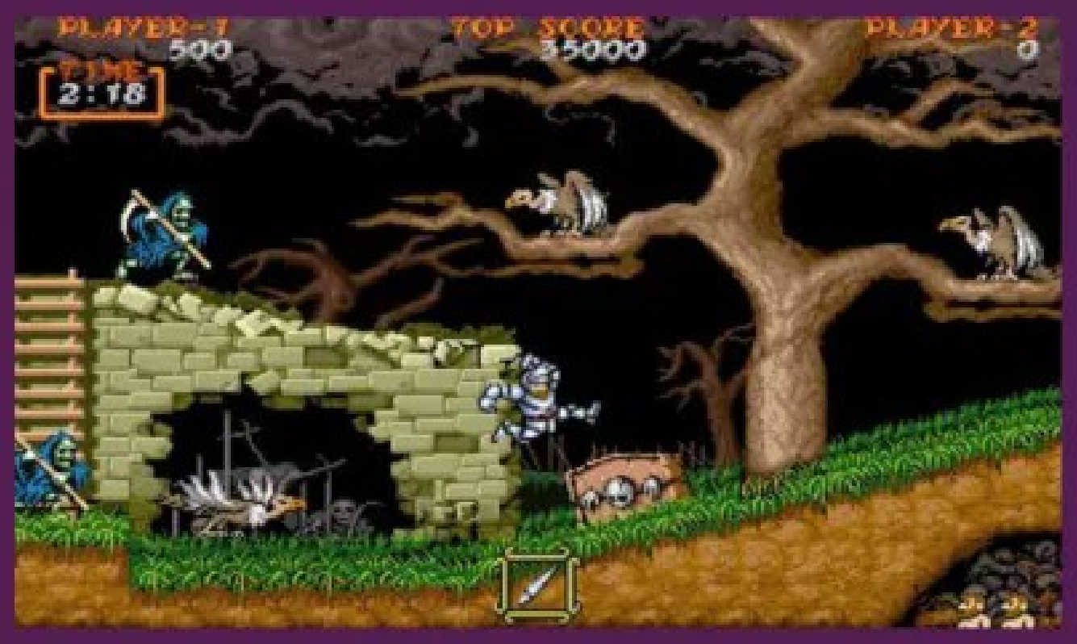


■ The second time you reach the end, you'll have the 'ultimate weapon' and you can kill Lucifer.

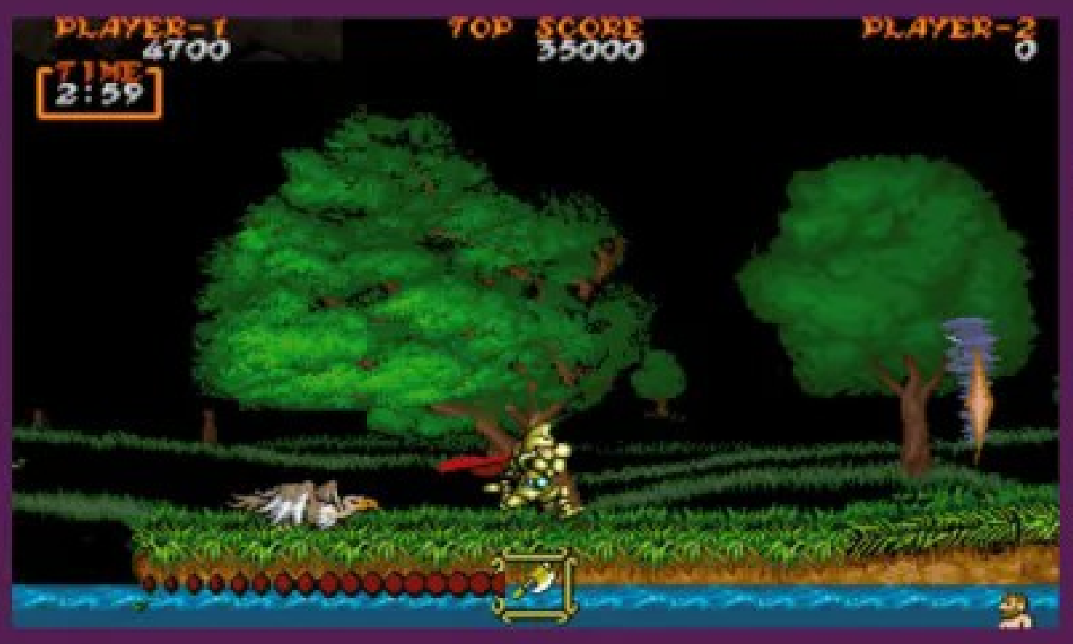
ARTHUR'S QUEST

Maps play an important role in the *GNG* games. They show you how far into the first stage you've reached after an hour (and 50 credits), they also reveal a glimpse of the imaginative level design you could have witnessed had you been born a platform game savant. Here's the *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* map in all its entirety. Five stages of torment, which take you from a graveyard, up the leaning tower of Pisa, and deep into the fiery pits of hell.

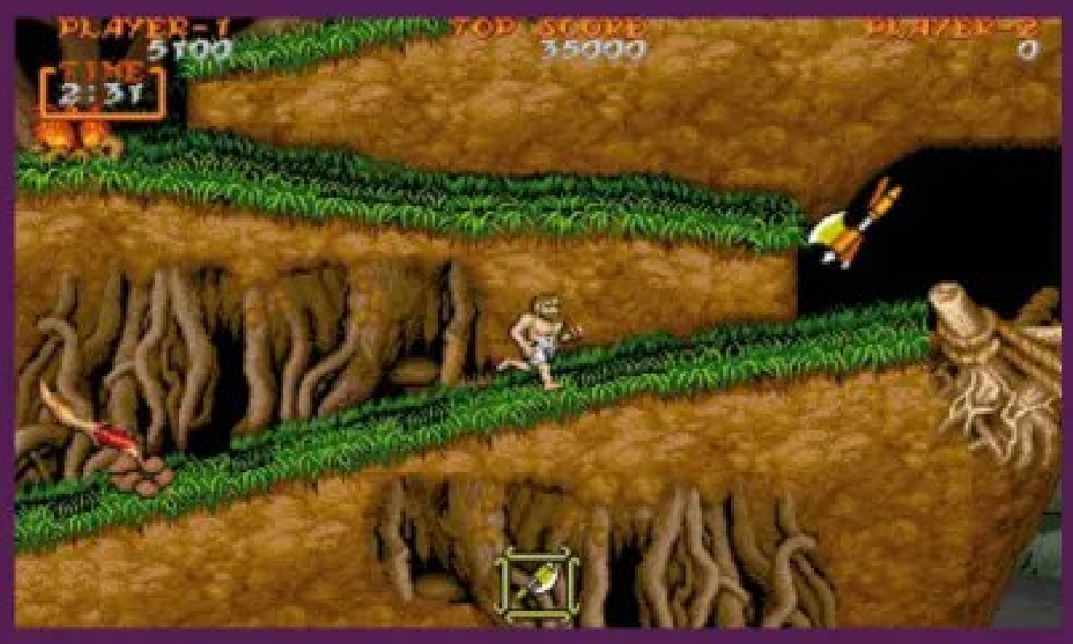
STAGE 1



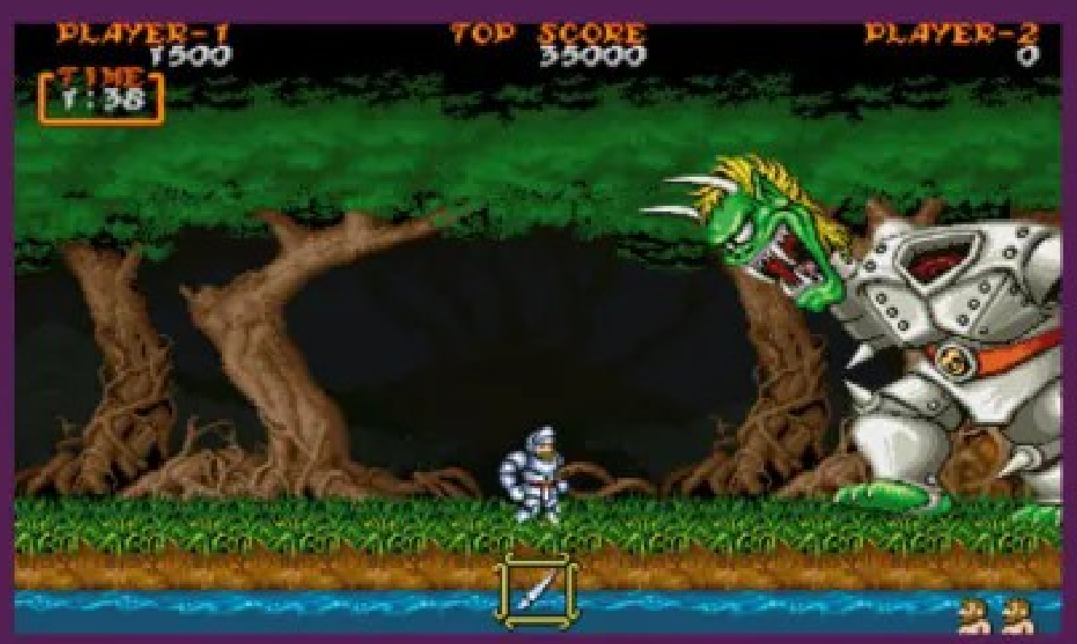
■ The first stage of any *GNG* game begins in a graveyard. Things begin easily enough with an unlimited number of skeletons in blue ponchos to evade.



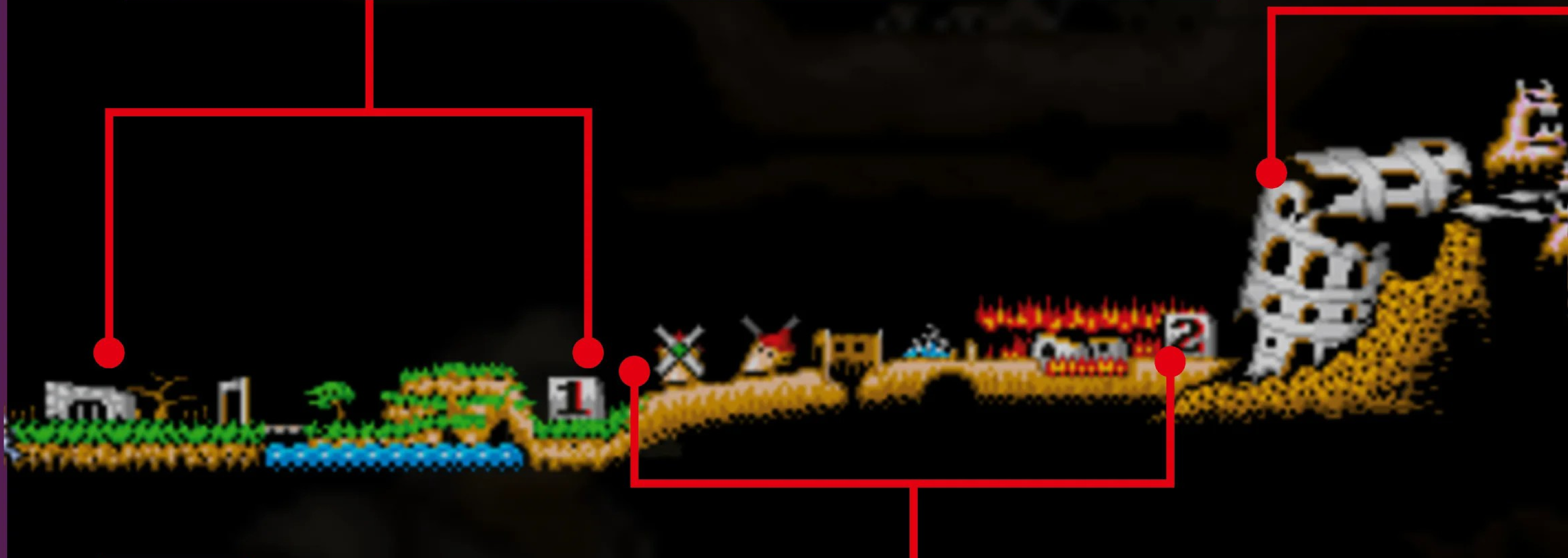
■ The midway point in the first stage is where you encounter the first real taxing section of the game. These spinning demons erratically descend toward you. Don't shoot them, just take your time.



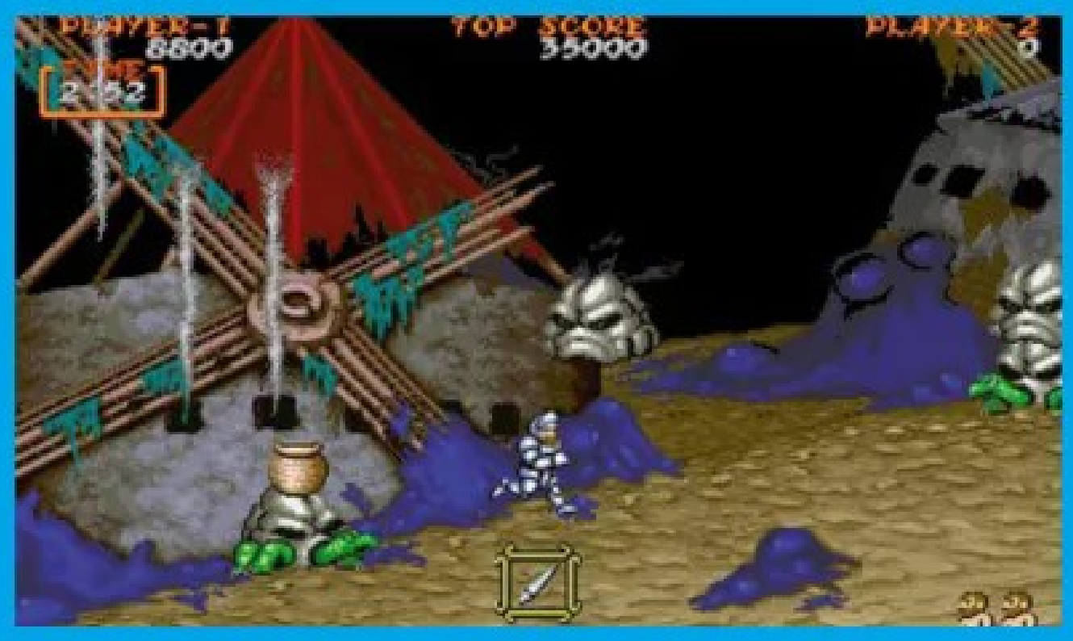
■ It's all uphill until the first boss. Avoid the treasure chests and keep hold of your lances. Clear the ledges of enemies, using Arthur's overhead attack before advancing.



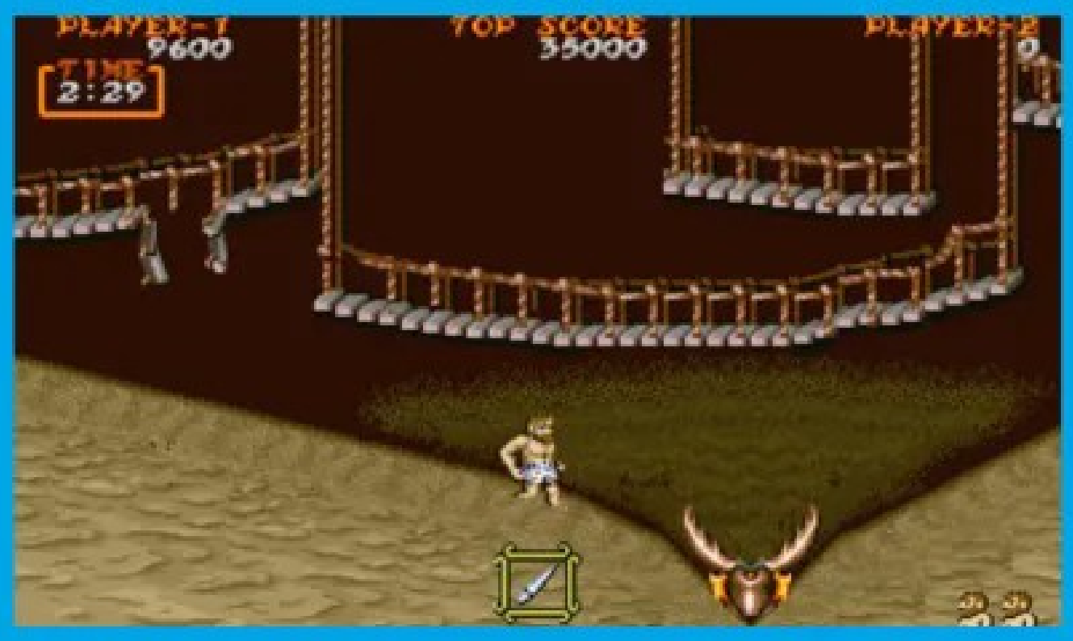
■ The first boss you will encounter, Shielder, is pretty easy. Keep to the far left of the screen, avoid his flaming spit, and shoot him in the head until he explodes.



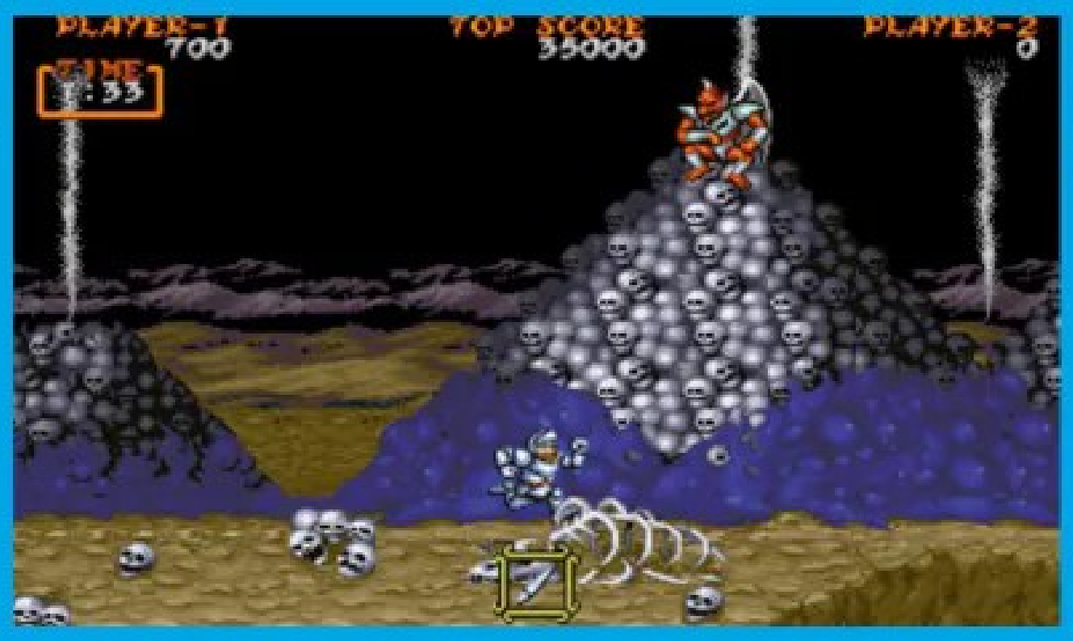
STAGE 2



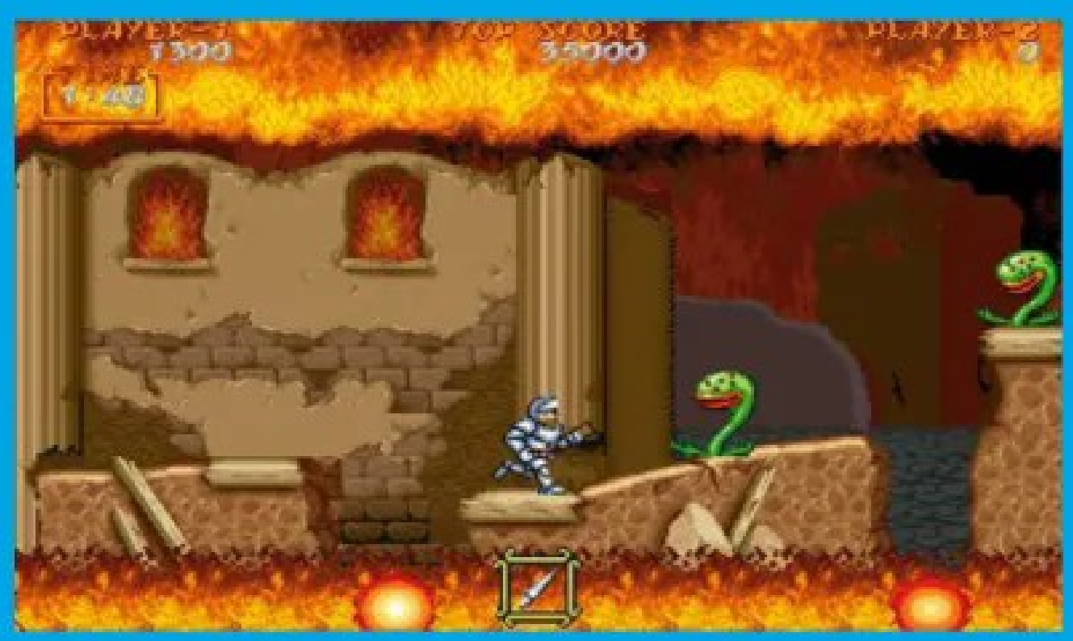
■ Stage two is set in a desolate town. Watch out for those jumping masonry heads, and shoot the cute-looking turtles as their size makes them difficult to leap over.



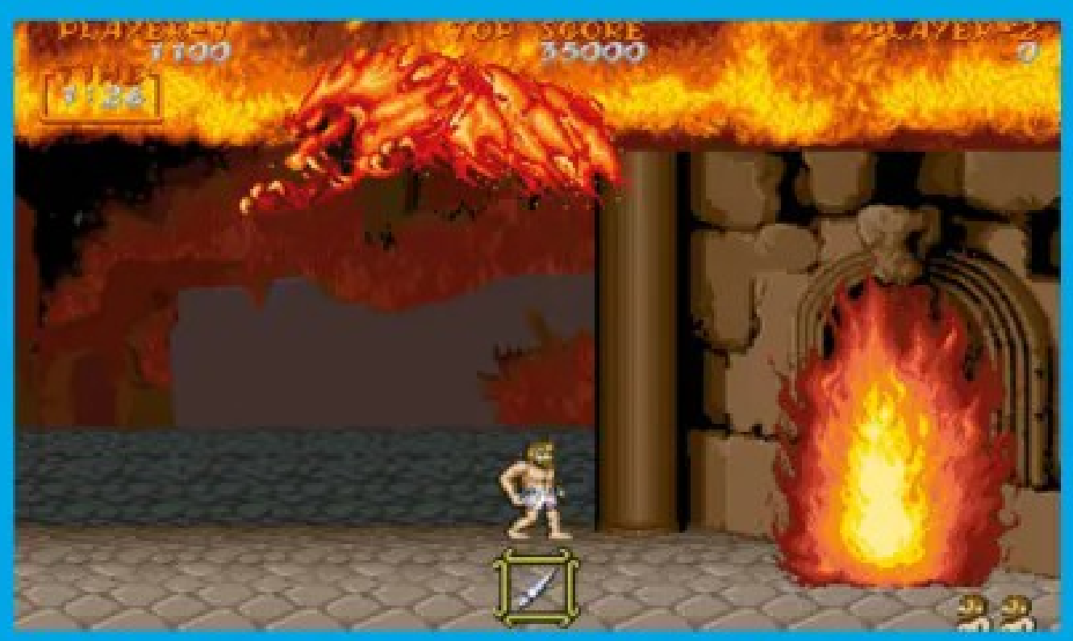
■ This section is a case of trial-and-error and we don't really care for it. Tread carefully over the booby-trapped bridges, otherwise it's down the throats of Sarlacc Pit Monster you go.



■ This is the first time that Arthur encounters the Red Arremer in this game. Basically just run for your life and don't engage him – he's almost impossible to hit.

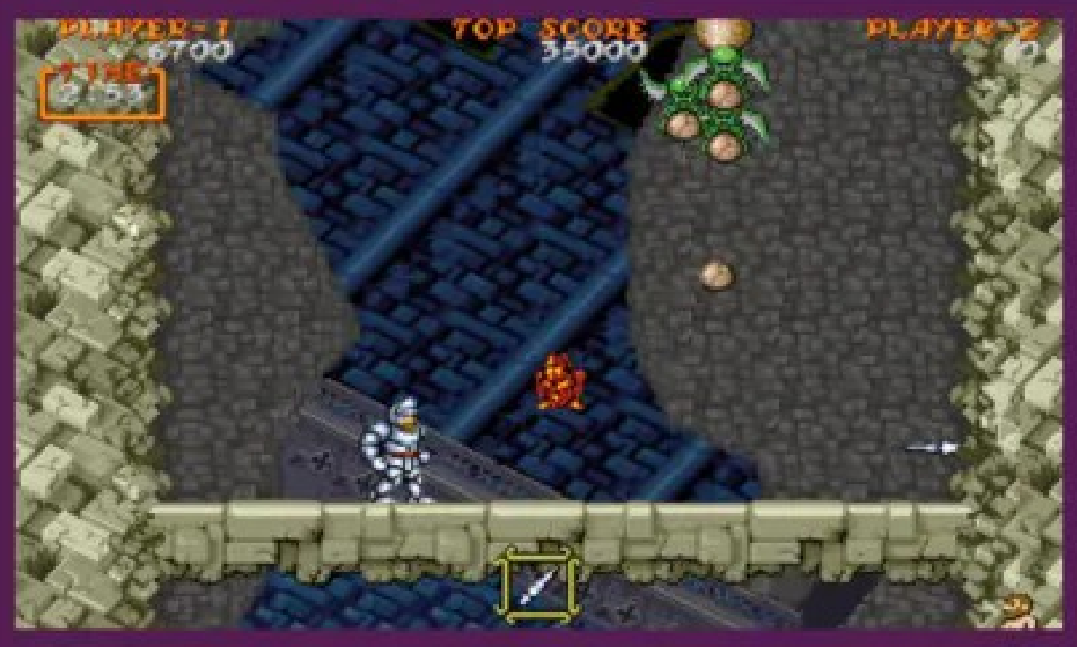


■ This stretch sees Arthur dodging Mario-esque spitting plants and flaming demons. Consider your jumps because if a suited Arthur falls into the flames it's game over.

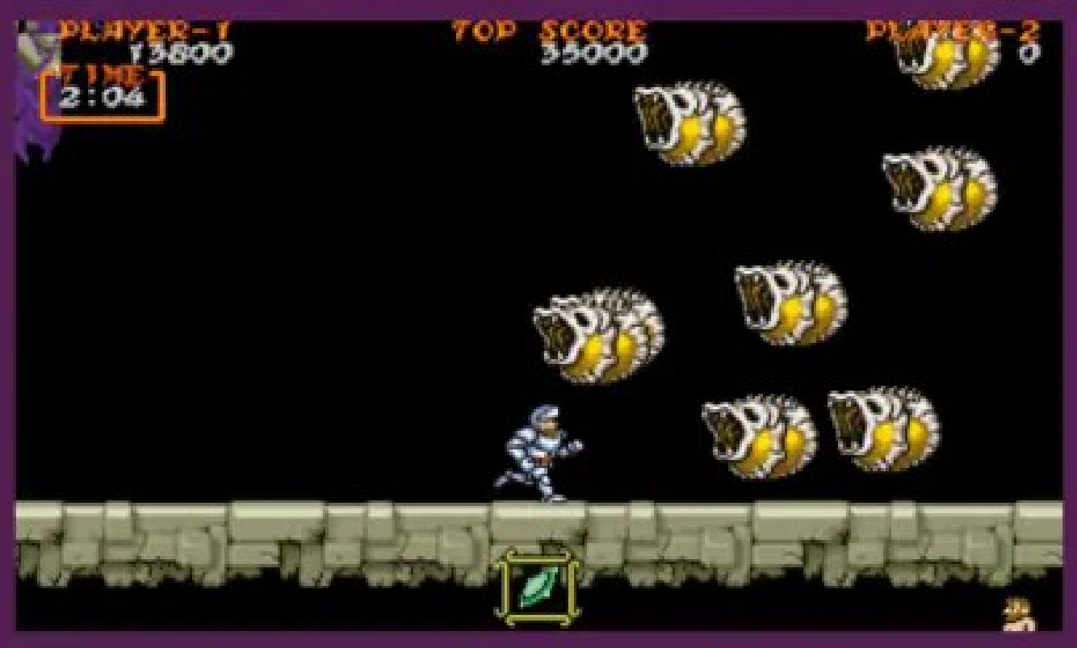


■ Cerberus is easy to kill if you note his attack pattern. Duck when he pounces and be sure to shoot away the flames he drops on you when he flies over the top.

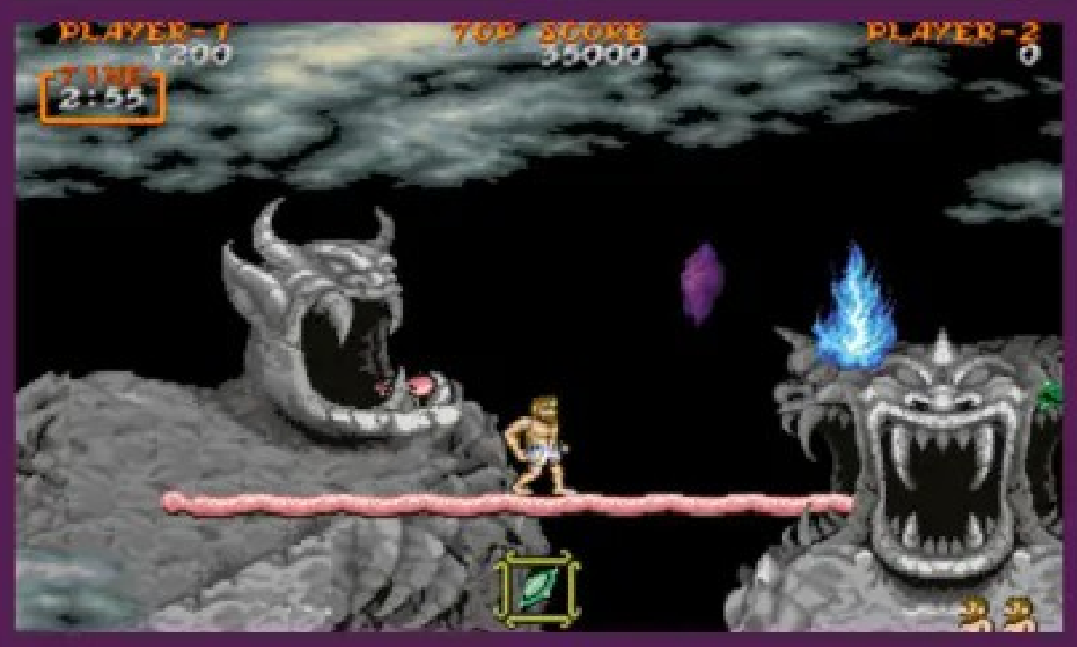
STAGE 3



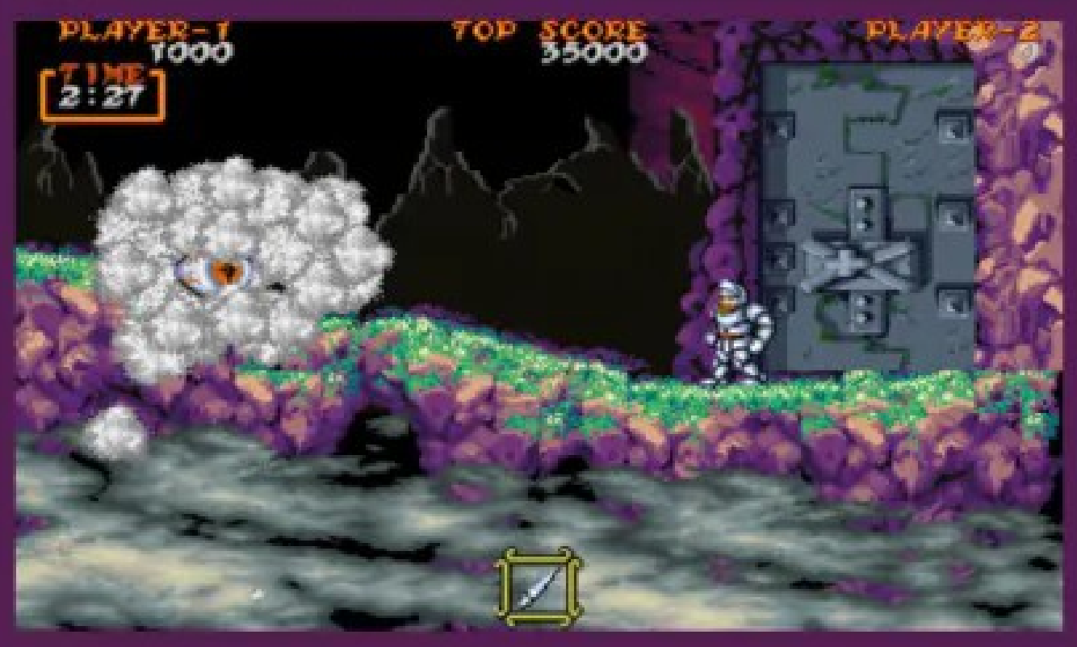
This is probably the most annoying stage in the game. It's littered with precarious jumps and shifting platforms, so acute timing and familiarising yourself with the layout is paramount.



The platform on which you stand is rising, so if you don't run to the edge of the screen in time, you'll get squished by the ceiling. It's best to run through these lemon-hugging skeletons, take a hit, and get to safety.

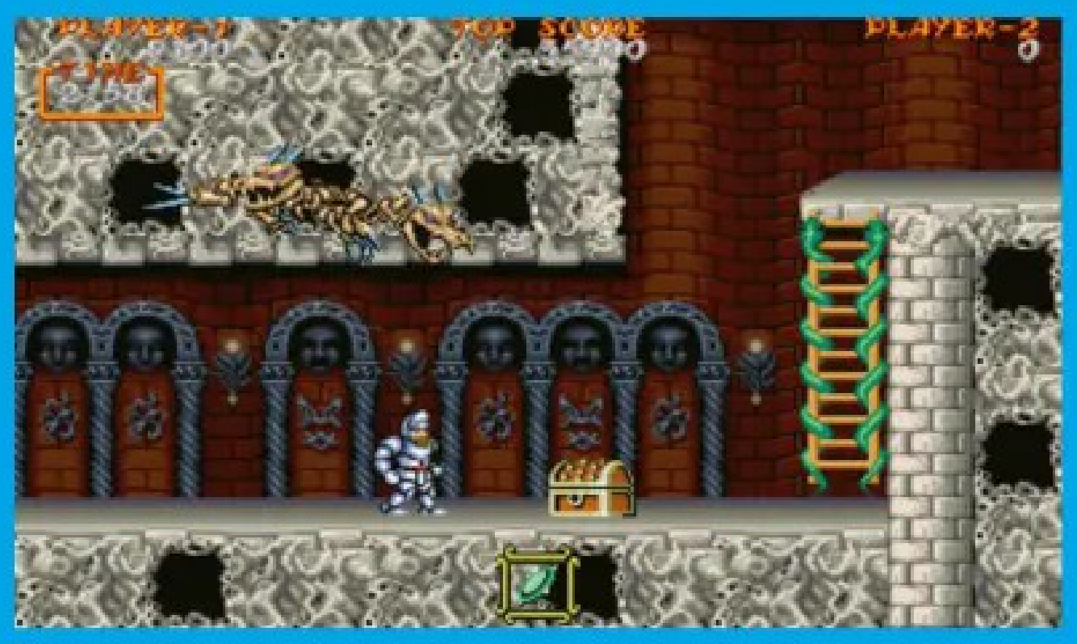


Jump on the stone golems' tongues, but don't get too close, otherwise they'll chew you up. Consider all jumps. Get through this section and you have what it takes to slay this beast.

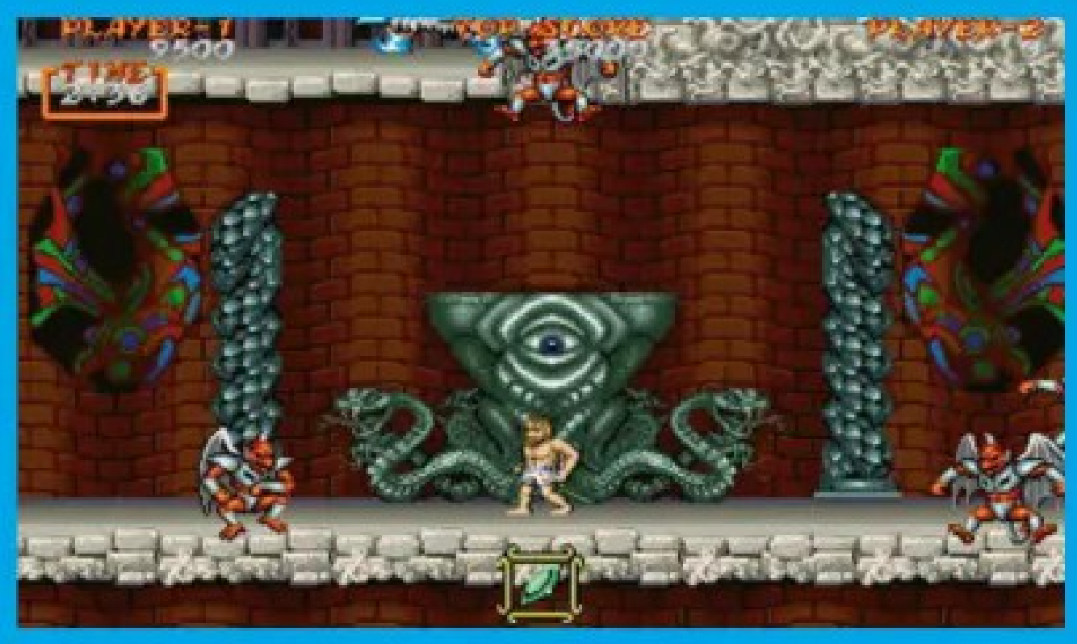


Gassuto is tough because, given his vaporous appearance, it's difficult to gauge any attack pattern. We advise that you keep your distance and try and draw the fight out.

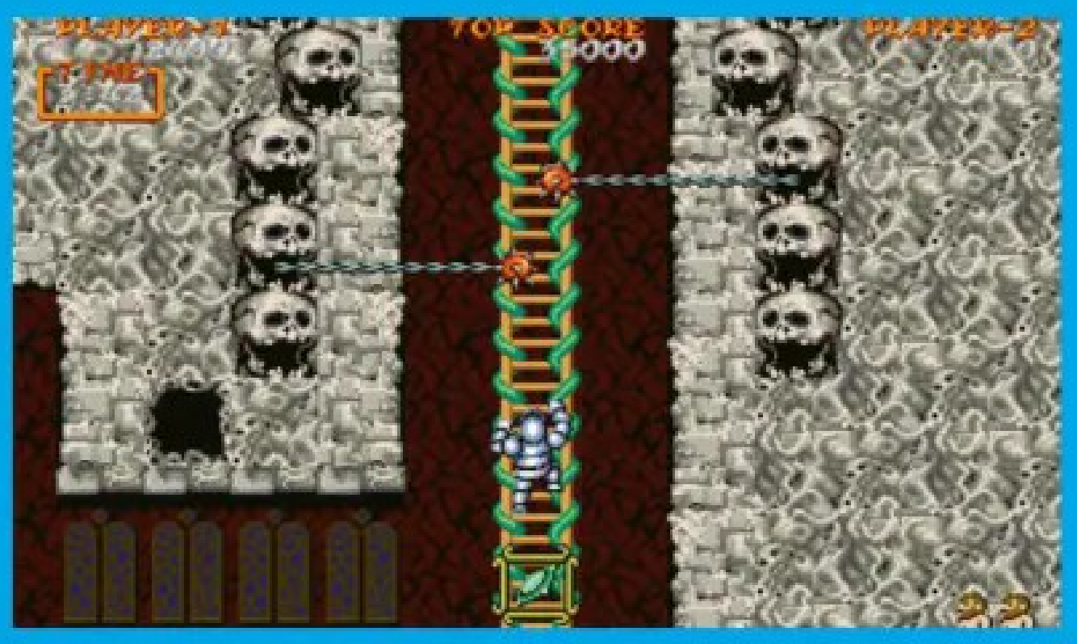
STAGE 5



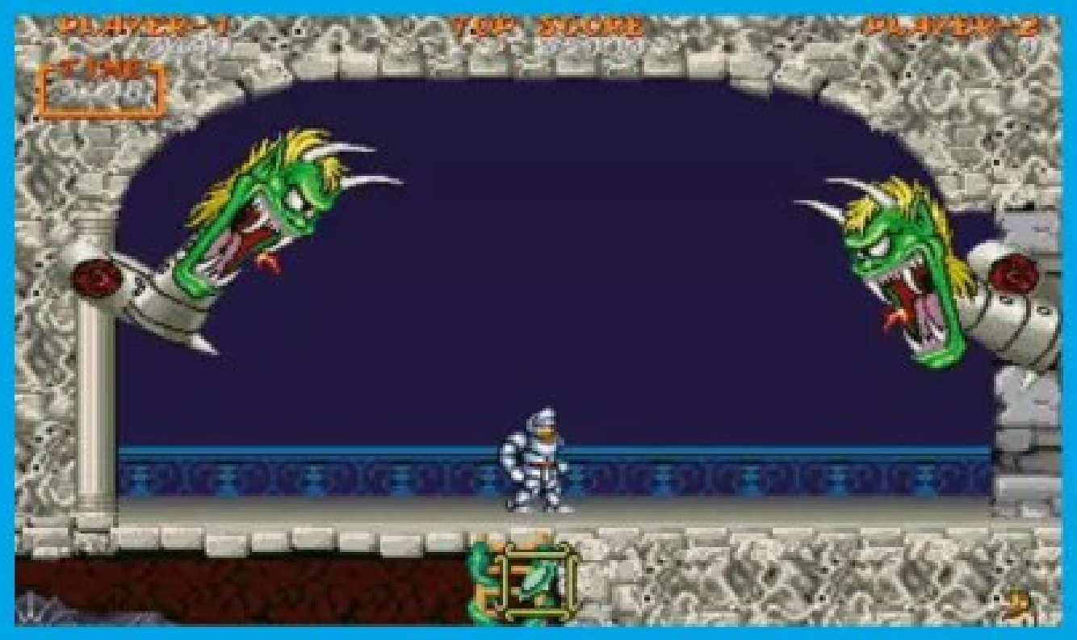
Eventually, you will reach the final stage of the game. This level is essentially a boss-rush section, so hone everything you have learned so far and let's finally put this sucker to bed.



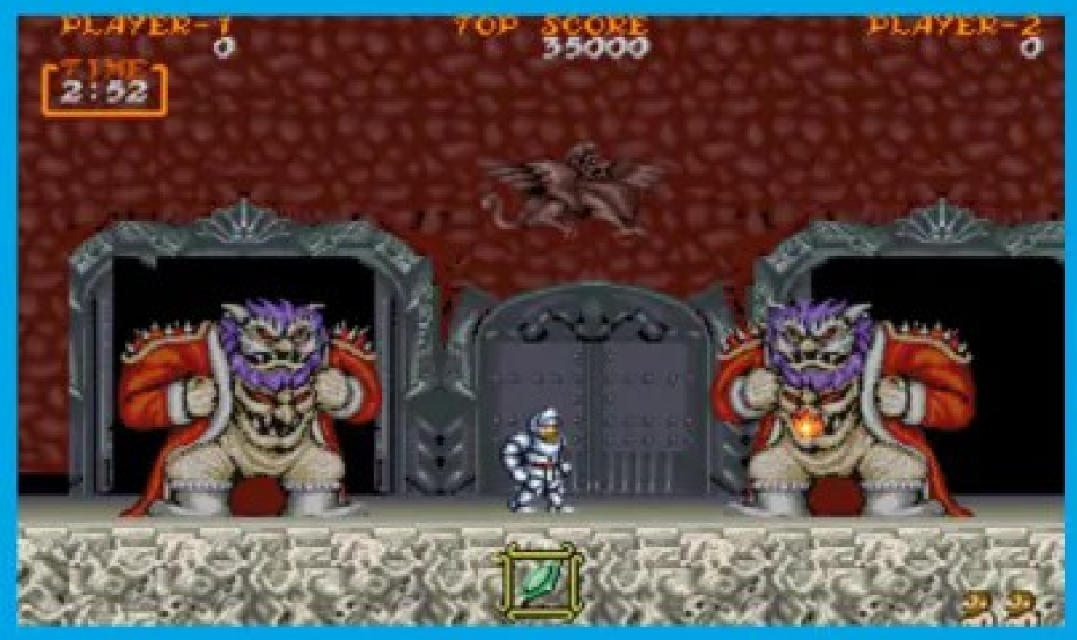
A tricky section, this one. Here you're ambushed by a team of Red Arremers. Just ignore them and only hit them if they're blocking your exit. Oh, and watch our for their sneaky dive attacks.



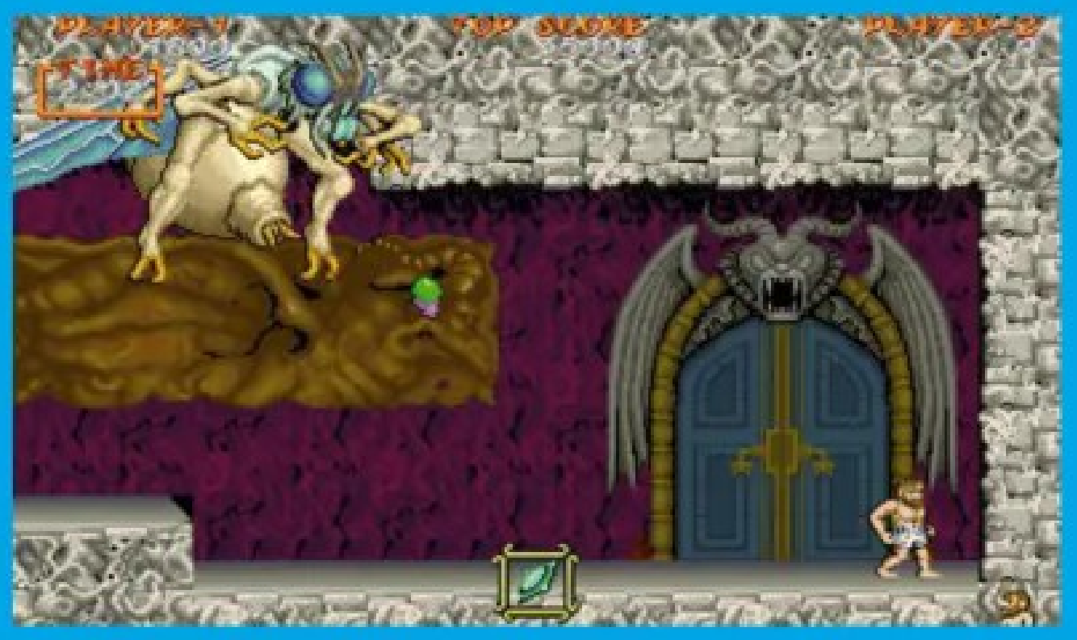
Before your first sub-boss, you must make your way up this dangerous ladder. Take your time because getting hit by the spikes that fire from the walls will knock Arthur down to the bottom rung again and may cause you to swear.



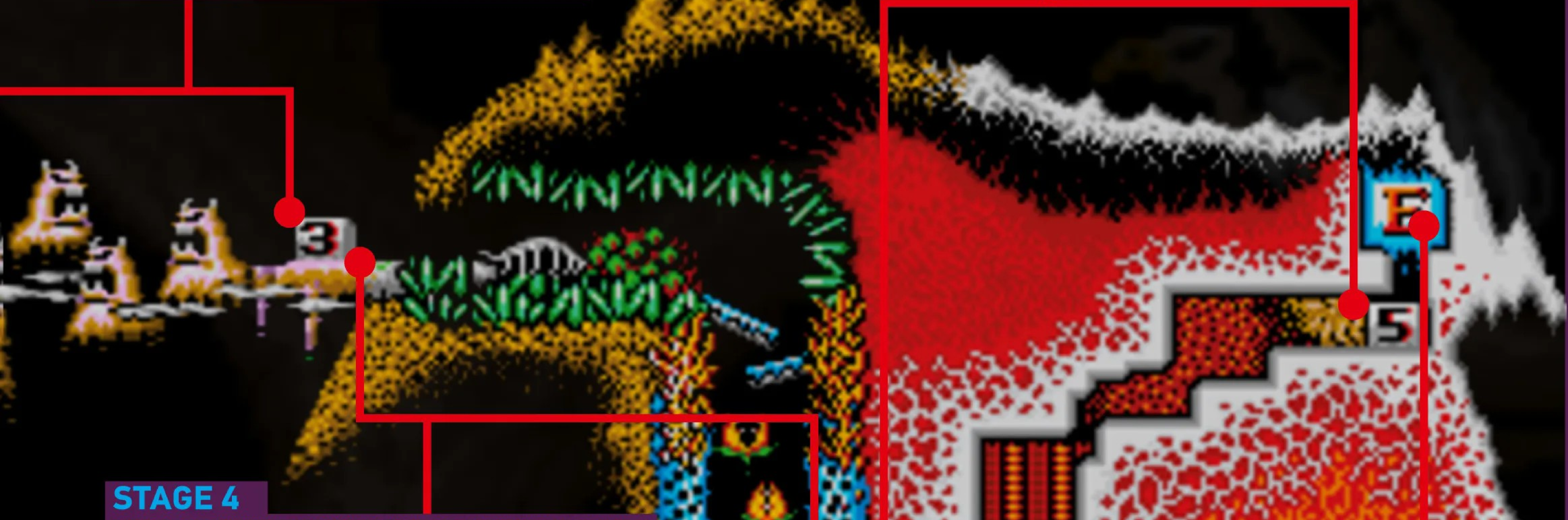
Remember this from the first level? Avoid the fireballs, get under one of them, and unload your weapon into its chin until he blows up. Then keep your distance and make easy work of the other one.



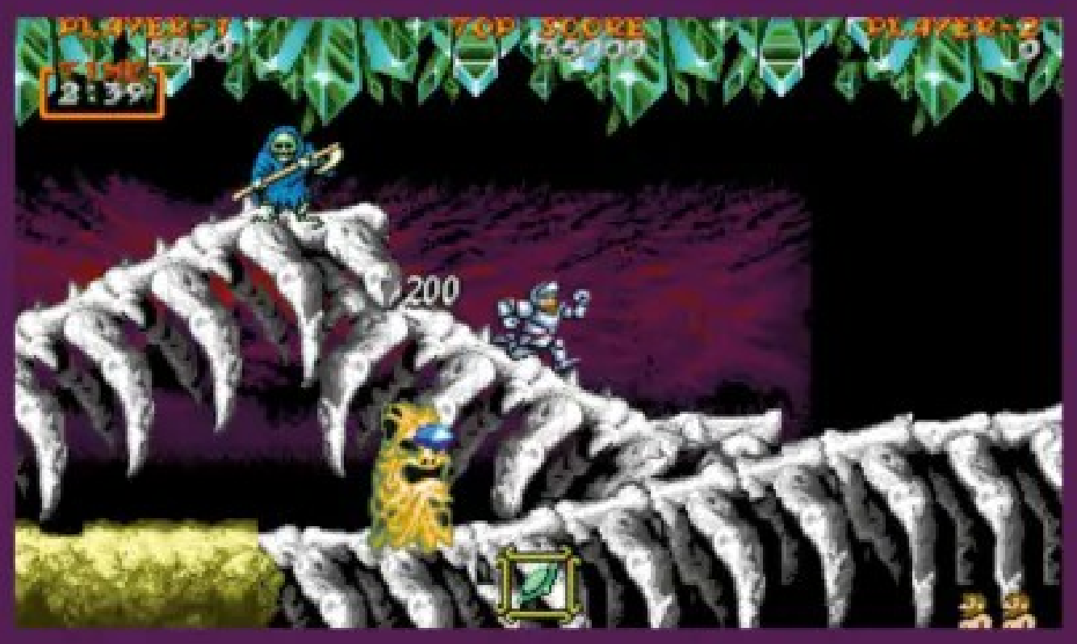
The same technique applies here. Move in close to take out the right-hand boss. Duck his flame breath and hit his face with your weapon while jumping. Then pick the other one off from a safe distance.



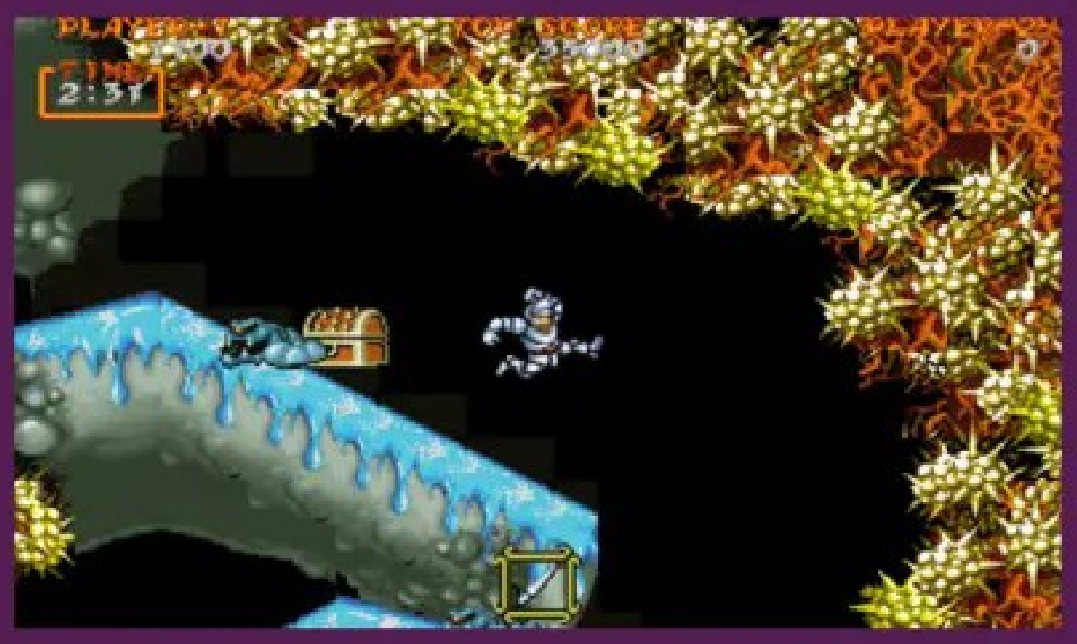
Beelzebub is a giant green fly made up of thousands of tiny flies. His attacks are impossible to dodge as they smother the screen, so run at him and try to hit him as much as possible before he kills you.



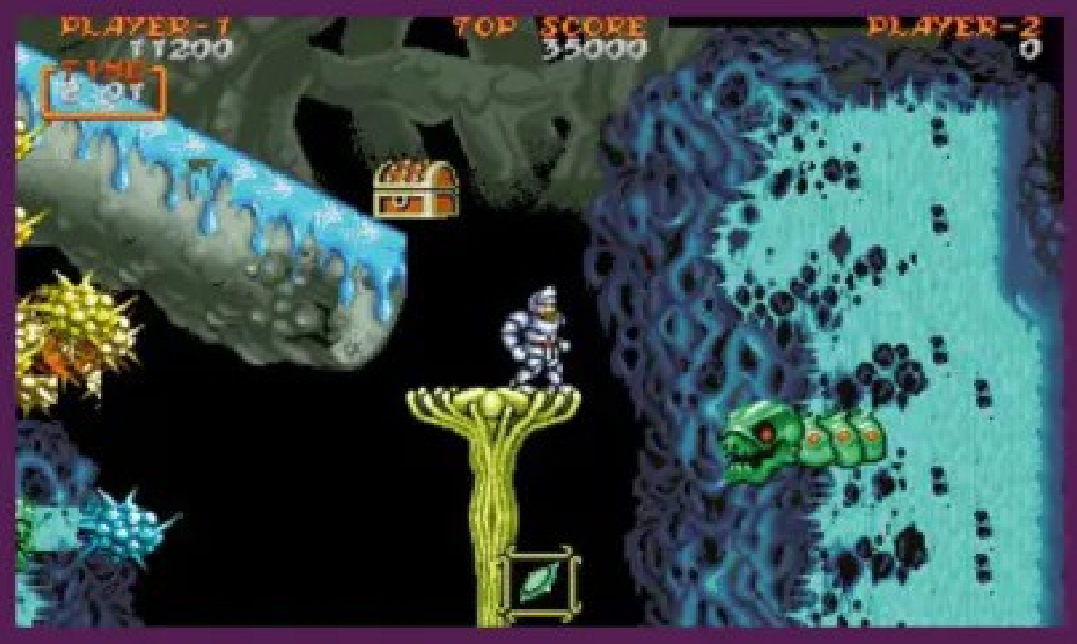
STAGE 4



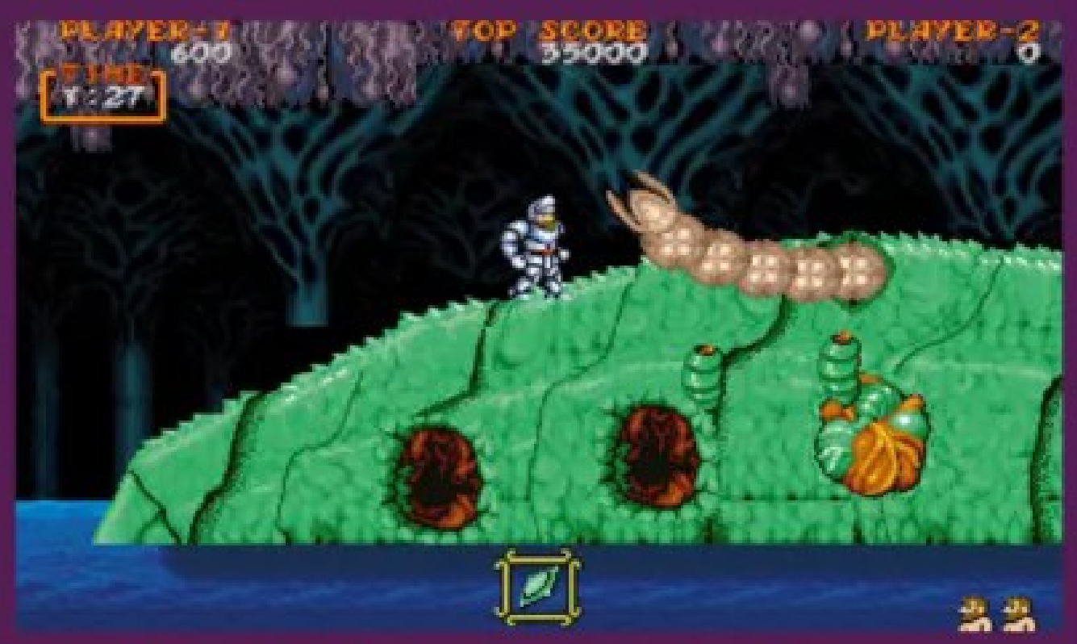
This stage, which has a slight air of Joe and Mac about it, is not as difficult as the last, but it's certainly no walk in the graveyard.



When walking diagonally, it's best to jump over enemies rather than execute them. Watch out for the spikes on the ceiling, too.

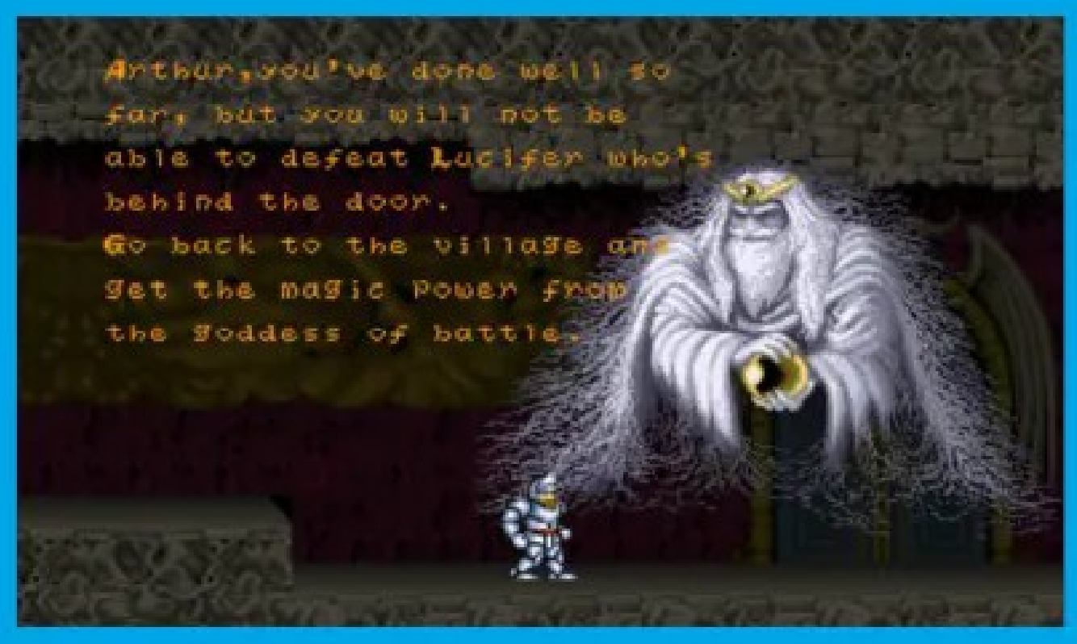


These yellow mushroom-type platforms drop into flytraps once you land on them, so watch out. More trial-and-error, sadly.

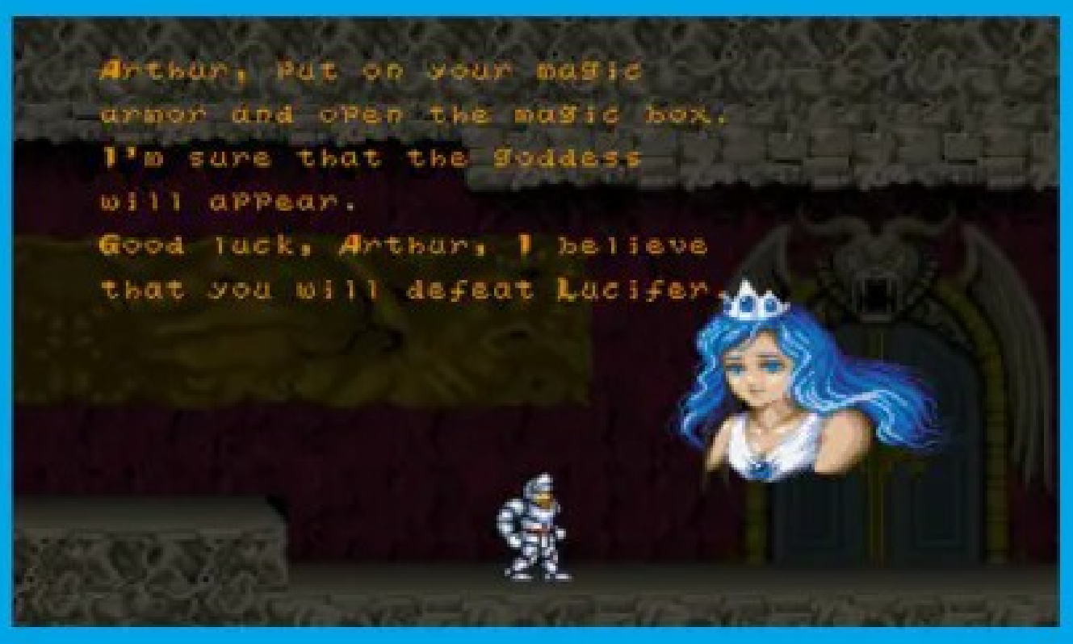


Ohme is the most frustrating boss. You have to jump and throw your lances beneath you and hit five pulsating weak spots on his body.

END



Arthur,you've done well so
far, but you will not be
able to defeat Lucifer who's
behind the door.
Go back to the village and
get the magic power from
the goddess of battle.



Arthur, put on your magic
armor and open the magic box.
I'm sure that the goddess
will appear.
Good luck, Arthur, I believe
that you will defeat Lucifer.

"And done. Whoa! What's that, Gandalf? We have to go all the way back to start and replay the entire game again? Look, pal, if it's all the same to you, we'll just take our women and be off. Nice orb, though.

What? Not you as well, Prin Prin. Sod it. Save yourself, you ungrateful troglodyte. I'll seek out this goddess you keep banging on about and cop off with her instead."

LINK

Nintendo's tunic-wearing sword wielder is capable of bringing out the hero in all of us

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** LINK
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** CADENCE OF HYRULE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** GREEN TUNICS

A persistent evil dwells in the kingdom of Hyrule, a force of malevolence that rises time and again to claim dominion over the land and all who dwell there. Over the course of centuries, the ordinary people of the kingdom have come to fear and dread the name of Ganon, usually as his previous appearance has faded from living memory. But while this wicked spirit cannot be truly extinguished, there exists a counterpart whose role is to turn back this menace, no matter how bleak the situation may have become – and that personification of virtue is Link.

Link's world-saving adventures often involve common elements: the need to rescue Princess Zelda, the fight against Ganon and the use of items including the Master Sword and the Triforce. But quite often his methods of achieving these goals differ between games – he may time travel, navigate the ocean or even transform into a wolf. That's because Link is not a single hero, but instead the latest in a long line of legendary heroes to bear the name. This means that Nintendo has always had a plausible storyline basis to revise Link's appearance and abilities between games, and rarely has to contrive a reason to strip him of his skills and experience, but it's not just useful from a game design perspective. The fact that you're always playing as a new Link also serves to level the playing field. Whenever you start a new *Zelda* game, it doesn't matter whether you're an experienced veteran of the series or a brand-new player – everybody starts from the same place. Nobody has to remember what happened in the previous game, because Link rarely does. Whenever you meet a new character for the first time, Link is doing exactly the same. There's a connecting thread that ties the whole story together if you're willing to look for it, and many people have spent a lot of time doing exactly that, but there's no need to concern yourself with it if you just want to have a good time with a *Zelda* game.

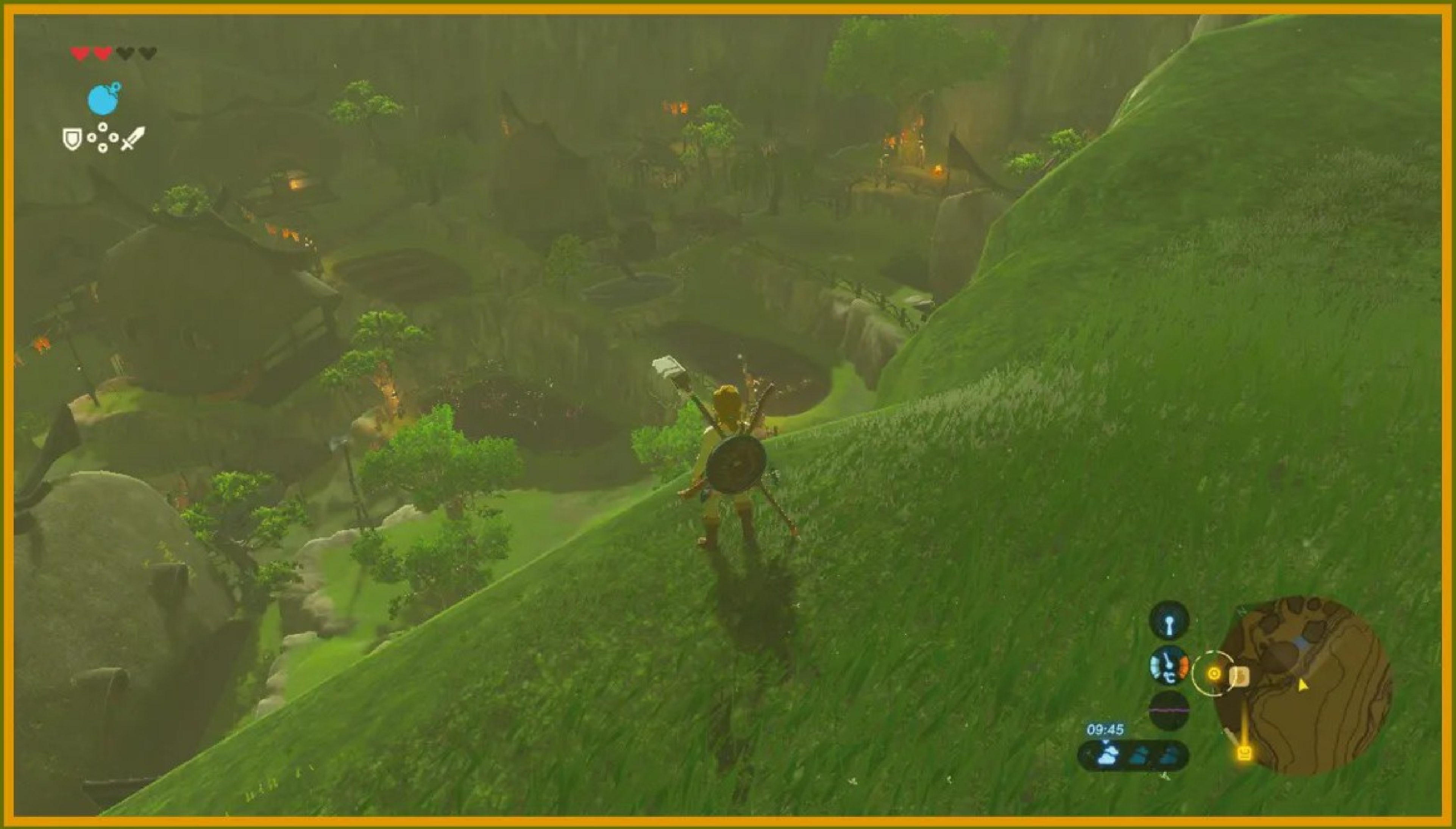
But despite the fact that nothing has to be the same from game to game, many elements often are. Very rarely does a game start with Link explicitly given the aim of saving his world. Link is usually young, anywhere from about ten years old to a teenager, and more often than not he's considered to be rather lazy by those around him. In fact, it's uncommon for him to even be ready for combat, as in many games one of his first quests will typically involve finding a sword and shield to actually fight with. But before long he will be drawn into the greater quest, and along the way he'll master a variety of new items along his long route to victory. Another thing that seldom changes is Link's verbosity, or lack of it. Link isn't strictly mute a lot of the time, in that other characters can hear what he's saying and respond to him, and he tends to be portrayed as being brave and compassionate in these interactions.

But beyond those broad brush strokes of personality, Link's actual words are never revealed to the player, with Nintendo's developers claiming that this is to better allow players to identify with the character and imagine their own interpretation of his conversations.

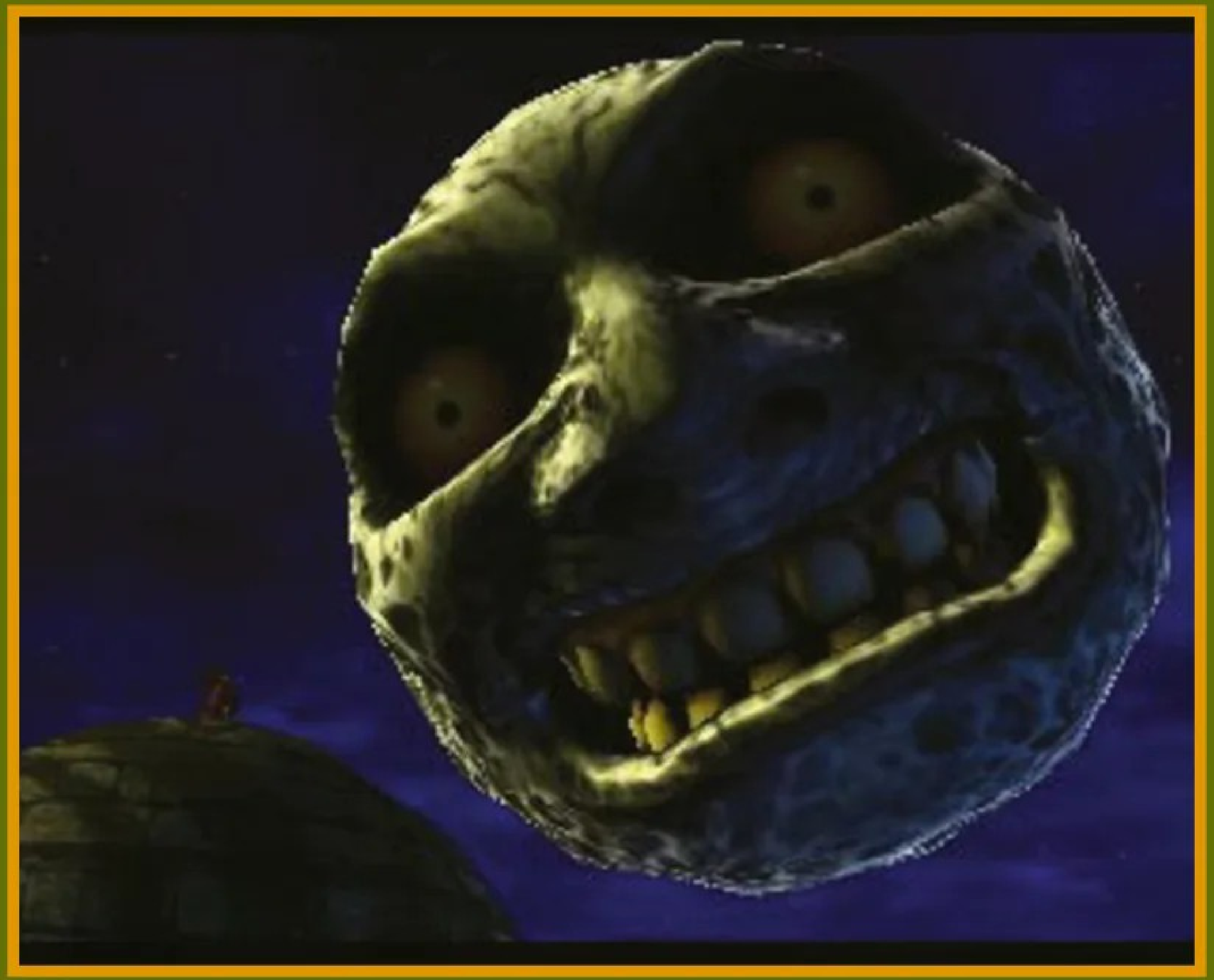
Indeed, Link is meant to be a character that players can easily project themselves onto, and as the star of action-RPG games, we can readily identify Link's accomplishments and development as our own. While he'll grow more resilient by collecting hearts and gain additional power by upgrading his sword, whenever you finally solve a tricky dungeon or best a troublesome boss, it's a shared victory and a shared bit of development. Link's wisdom is your wisdom, and his fighting prowess likewise.

> "It's a reminder that heroes are made, not born"

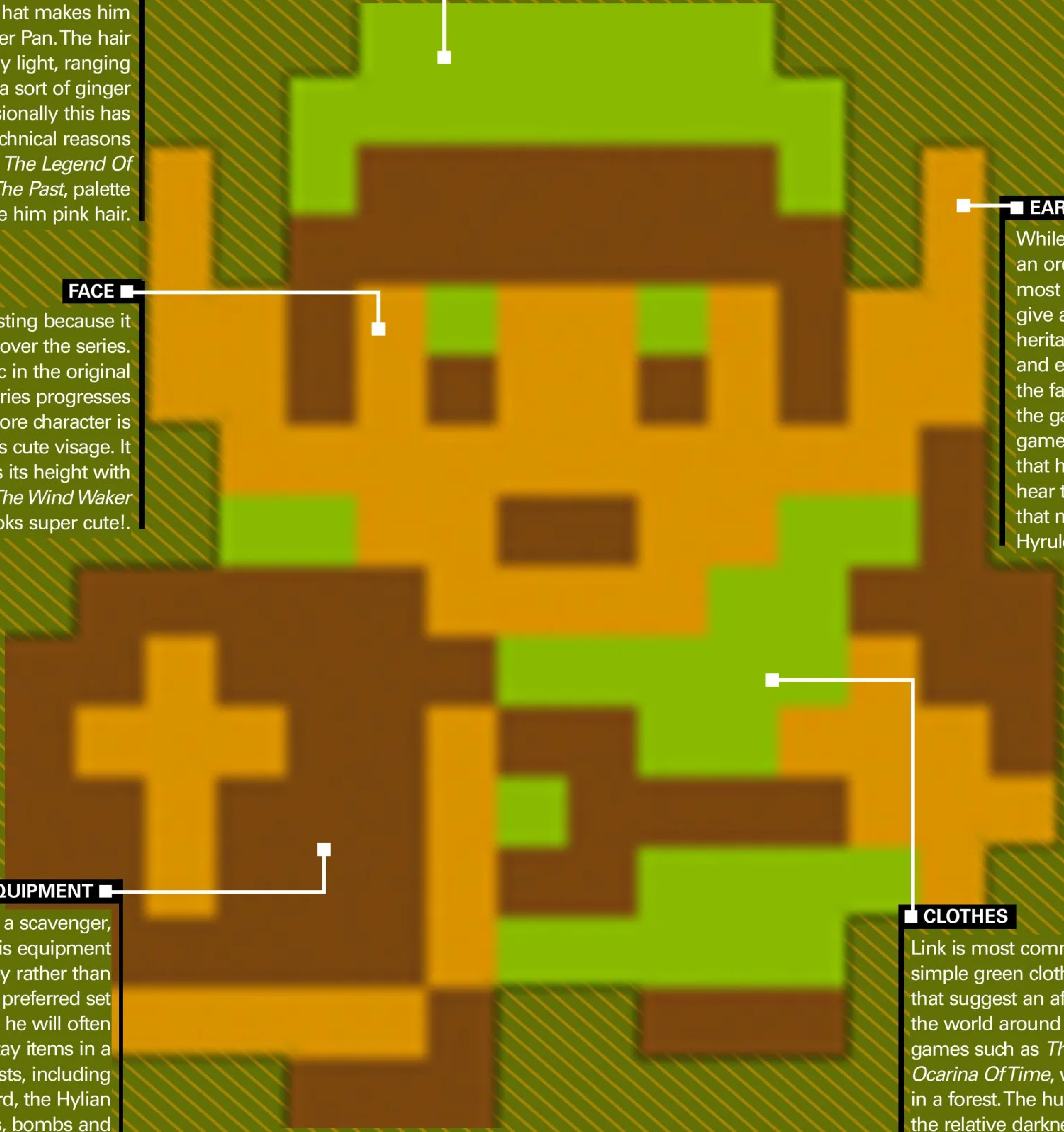
At the most basic of levels, Link's various incarnations over the years have cast him as one of the most enduring heroic archetypes – an ordinary boy who does extraordinary things. It's a reminder that heroes are made, not born – we don't have to be told that Link is a hero, because we watch him grow into one over the course of each game, and that's what makes him such an enduring icon of the gaming world. With his youth, he presents a world ripe with potential where you can carve your own path. With his skills, he allows us to perform athletic feats and combat manoeuvres that few of us could hope to pull off in real life. And with his silence, he allows us to step into his shoes – and even if we're ordinary, he enables us to become the heroes we wish to be. ✱



■ *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild* gave Link his first true open-world adventure, allowing him to explore anywhere he could see.



■ The bizarre atmosphere and three-day time loop of *Majora's Mask* makes it stand out from Link's other adventures.



HAT

Link's long, soft hat makes him look a little like Peter Pan. The hair it hides is usually light, ranging from blonde to a sort of ginger shade, but occasionally this has to change for technical reasons – for example, in *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, palette limitations gave him pink hair.

FACE

Link's face is interesting because it evolves so much over the series. He looks quite basic in the original *Zelda*, but as the series progresses more and more character is revealed on his cute visage. It arguably reaches its height with the rather brilliant *The Wind Waker* where he looks super cute!.

EQUIPMENT

Link is something of a scavenger, often acquiring his equipment along the journey rather than setting out with a preferred set of arms. However, he will often find certain mainstay items in a number of his quests, including the Master Sword, the Hylian Shield, boomerangs, bombs and even bows and arrows.

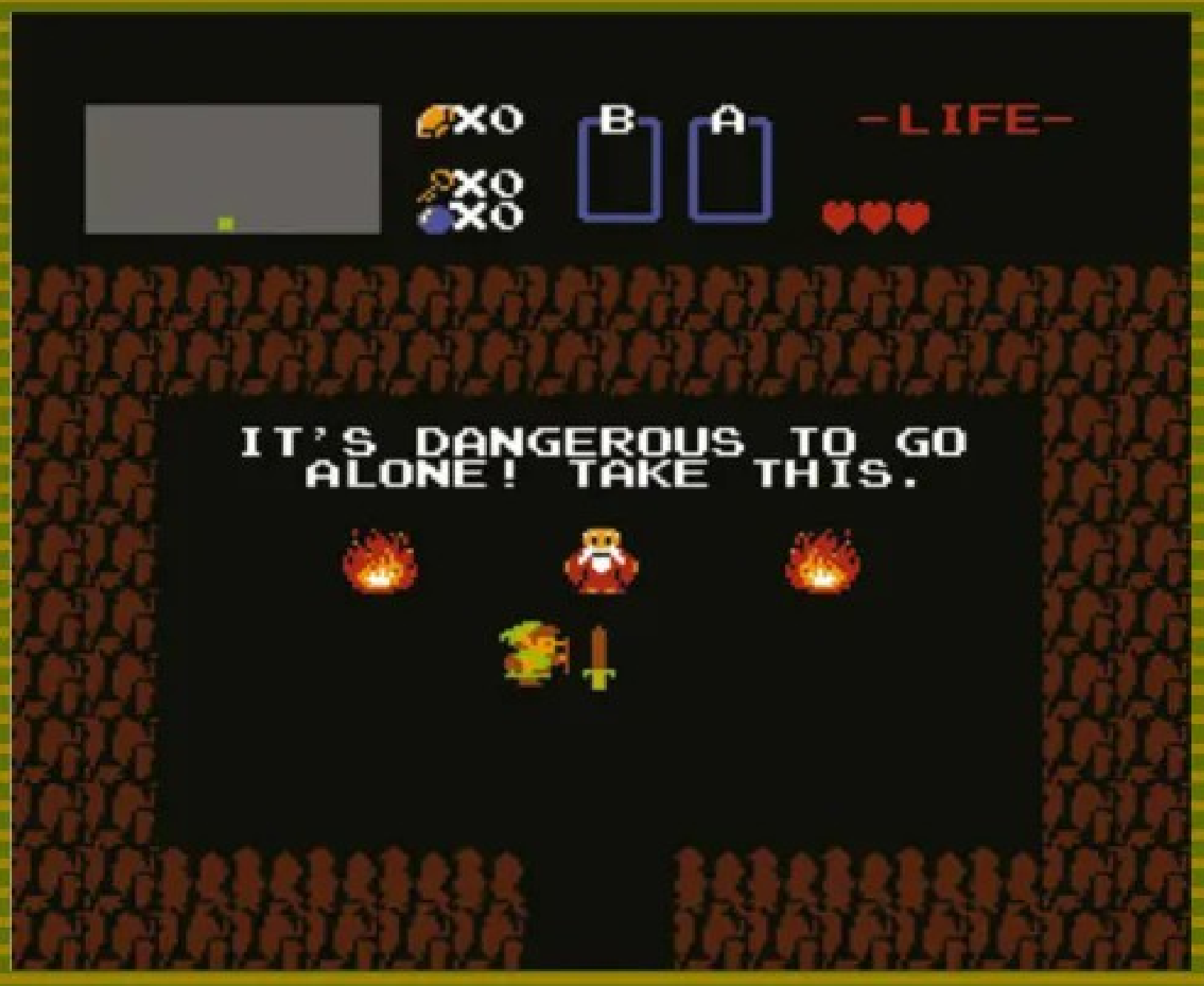
EARS

While Link appears to be an ordinary human in most respects, his ears give away his Hylian heritage. They're pointy and elf-like, playing into the fantasy themes of the games, and in some games it's explained that his ears are able to hear the gods in a way that most inhabitants of Hyrule cannot.

CLOTHES

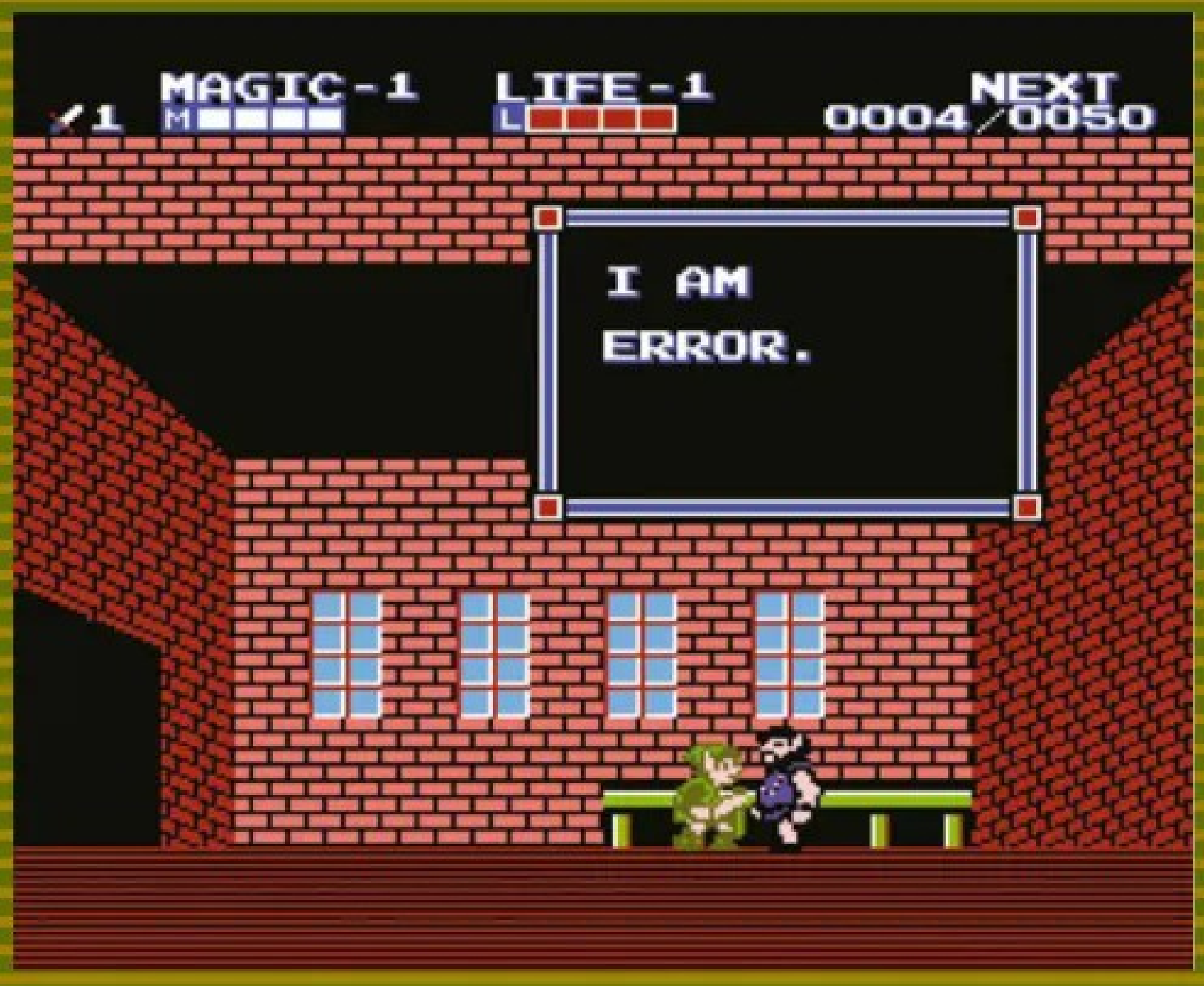
Link is most commonly seen wearing simple green clothes and brown boots that suggest an affinity for nature and the world around him – especially in games such as *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*, where he grew up in a forest. The hue tends to vary, with the relative darkness often reflecting the game's tone.

> MAGIC MOMENTS



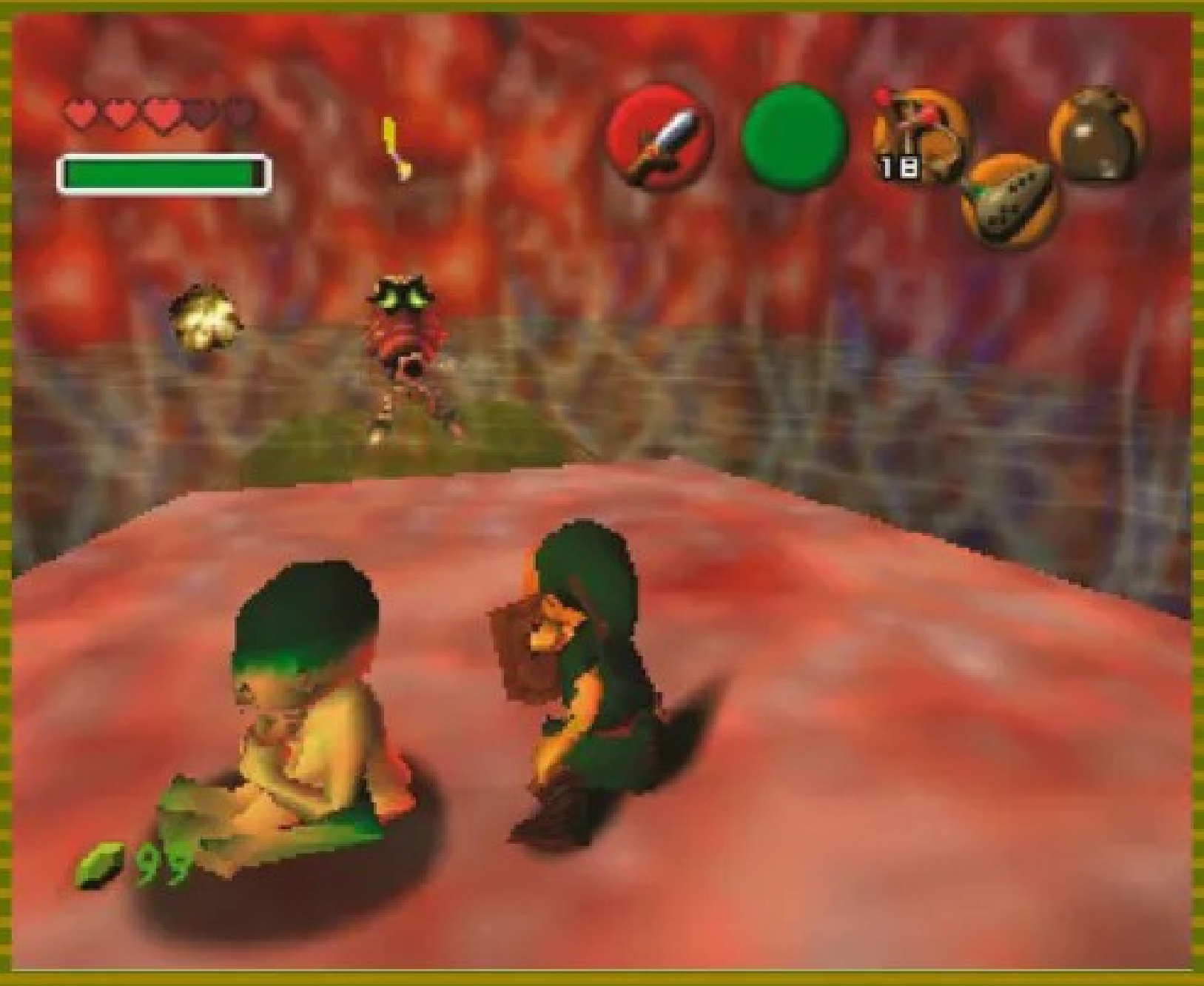
IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE! TAKE THIS.

■ Players were given Link's first sword and shield along with this memorable message.

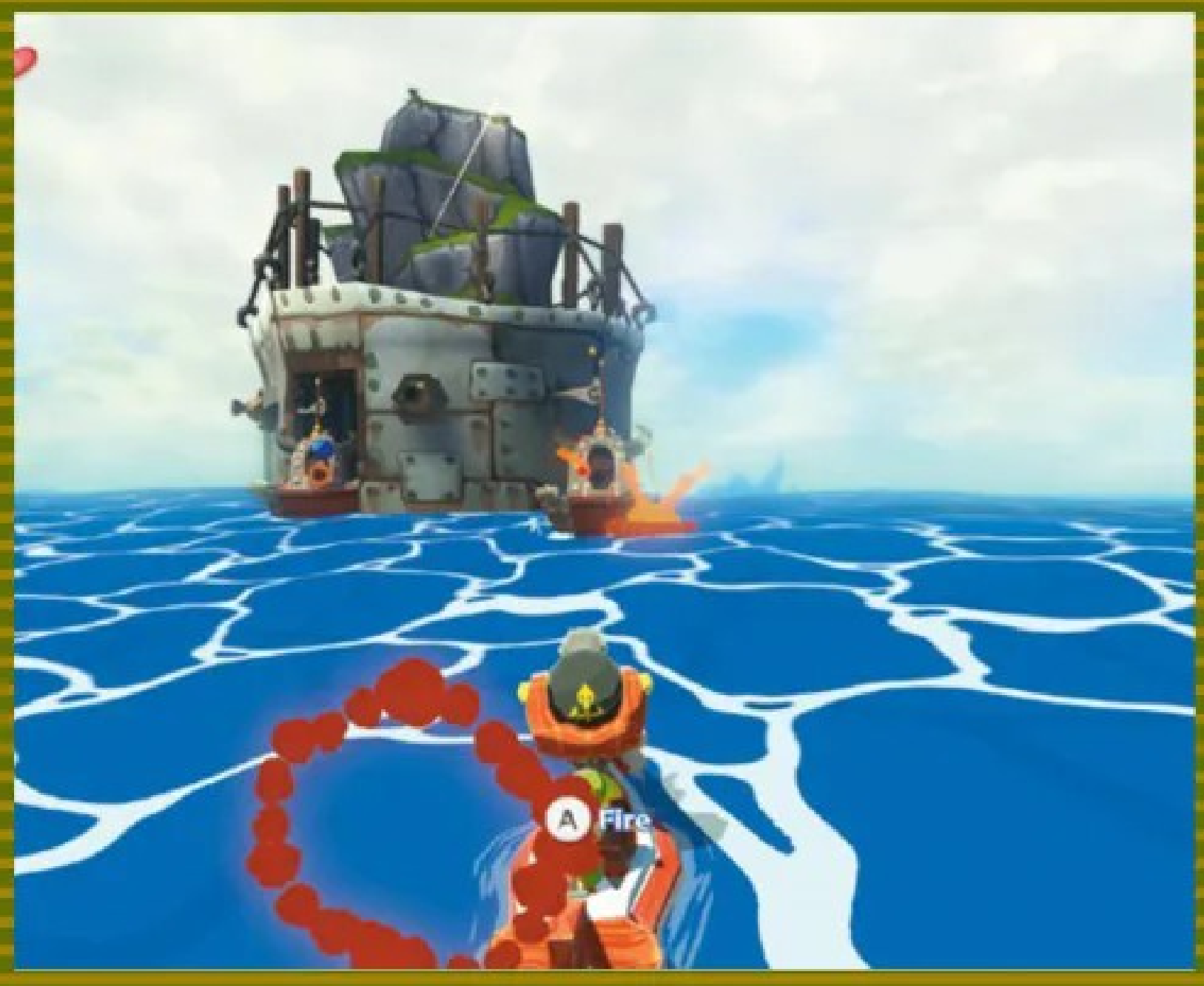


I AM ERROR.

■ Link meets many helpful characters, but also some miscreants like Tingle and Error here.



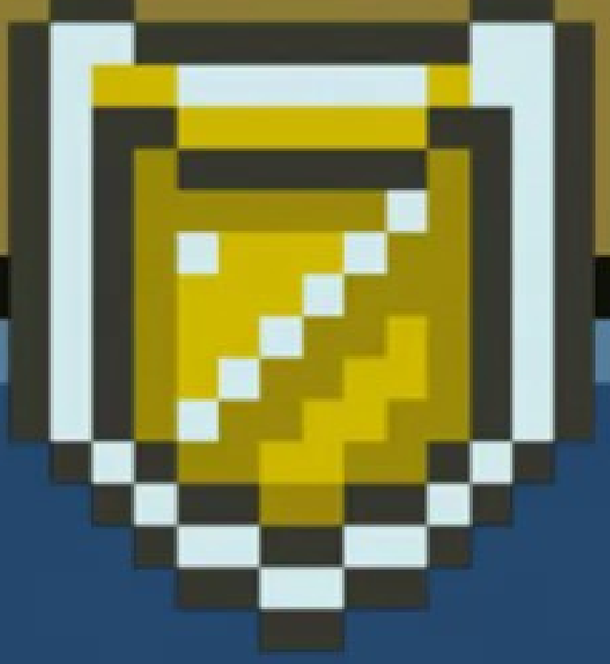
■ Link's first 3D adventure, *Ocarina Of Time*, is still considered one of the best games ever made.



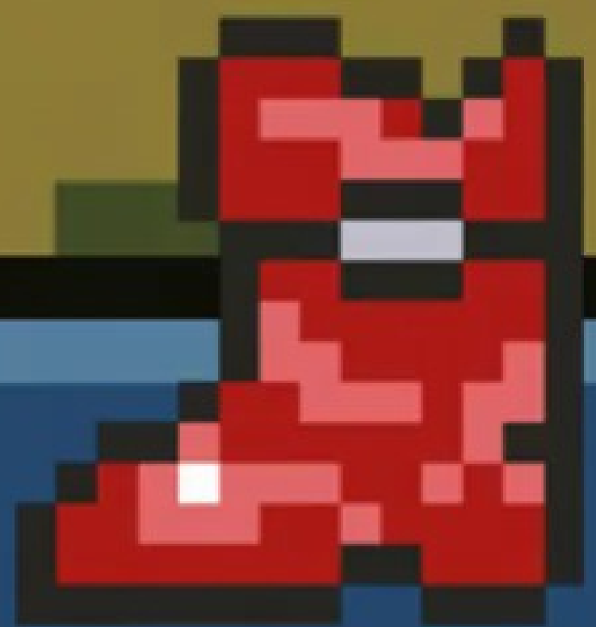
■ In *The Wind Waker*, Link got to explore a vast ocean world and even partake in combat at sea.

PREPARE FOR ADVENTURE

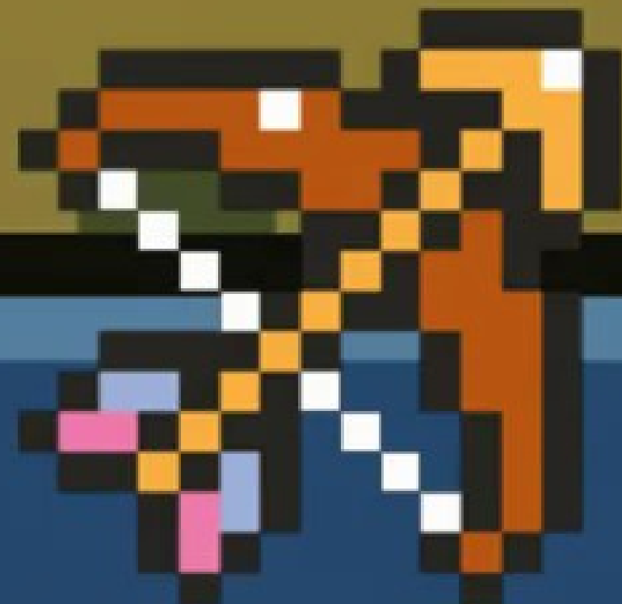
Link has very few powers or abilities of his own, so his methods of achieving victory over Ganon rest with the equipment and items he carries. Here are some of the notable ones you can find…



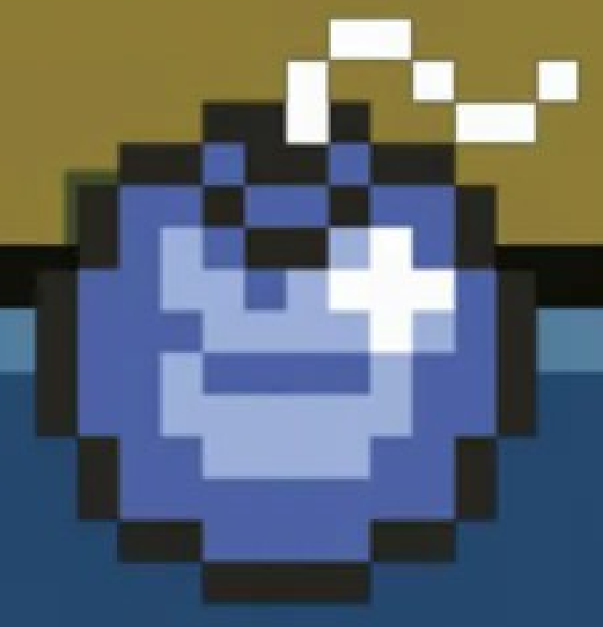
MIRROR SHIELD
■ This rather nifty shield doesn't just block physical attacks – its mirrored surface allows it to reflect light beams and some magic.



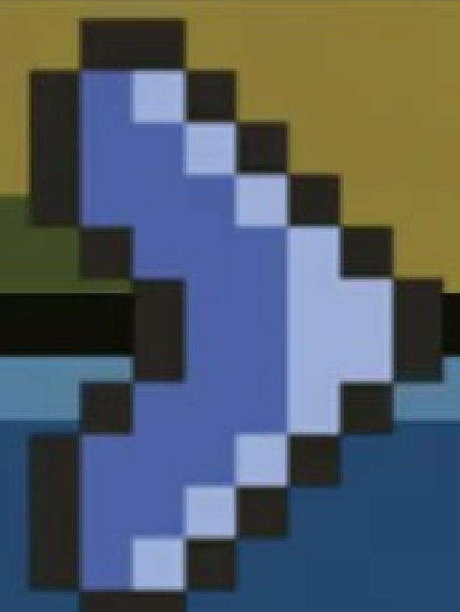
PEGASUS BOOTS
■ These boots allow Link to perform a high speed dash, enabling him to break things and dislodge objects from high places.



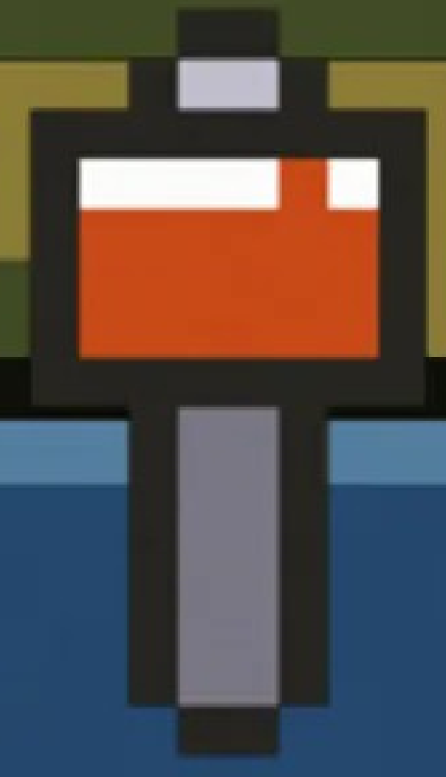
BOW AND ARROW
■ A classic piece of weaponry, which has a much longer range than Link's sword but also relies on limited arrows.



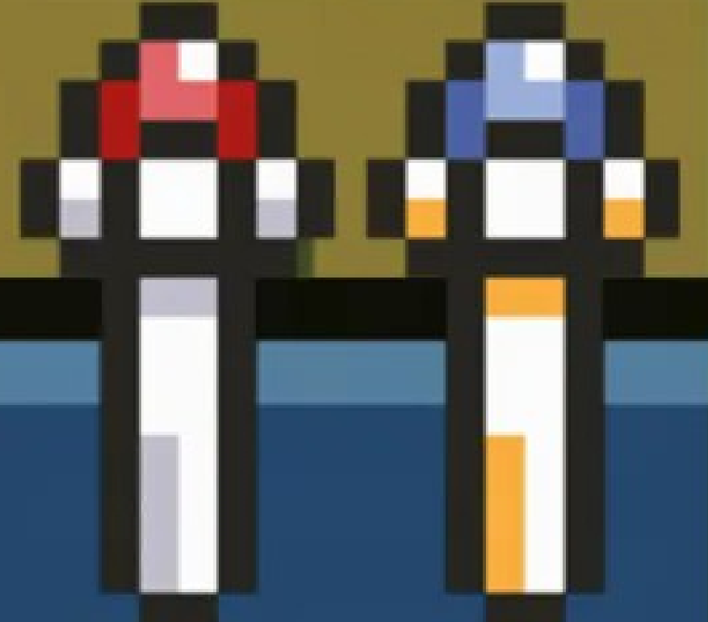
BOMB
■ Bombs also come in limited supplies, and enable Link to blow apart certain objects as well as performing explosive attacks.



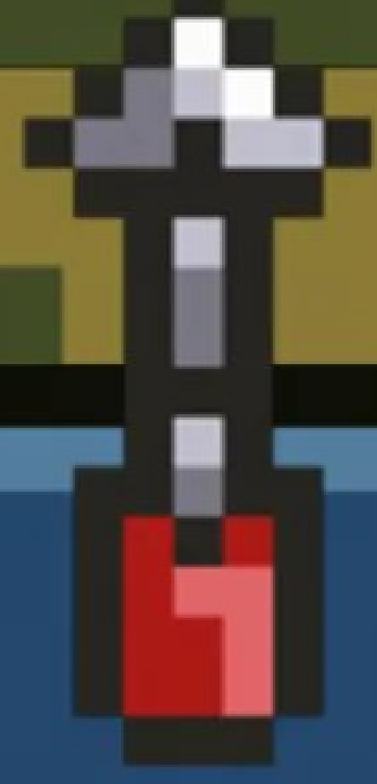
BOOMERANG
■ This classic hunting tool is capable of stunning enemies as well as damaging them. Upgrade it for a magical boomerang that flies further.



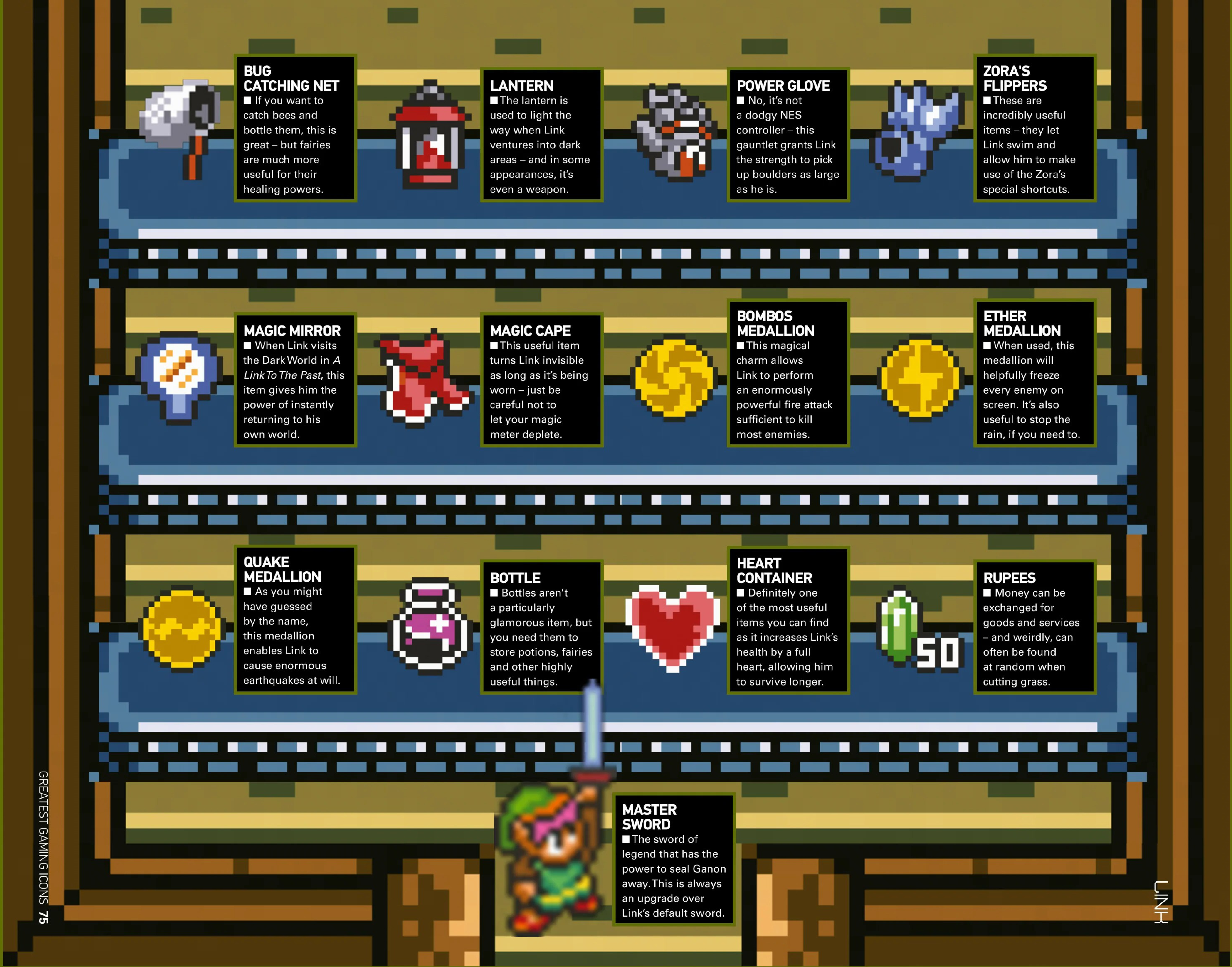
MAGIC HAMMER
■ This speedy weapon has a very short range, making it more effective for bashing pegs – unless your enemy is frozen.



FIRE AND ICE RODS
■ These rods allow Link to use elemental magic, useful for both lighting torches and freezing enemies.



HOOKSHOT
■ One of Link's most unique items allows him to drag himself towards certain items, and to also pull enemies towards him.



BUG CATCHING NET
■ If you want to catch bees and bottle them, this is great – but fairies are much more useful for their healing powers.

LANTERN
■ The lantern is used to light the way when Link ventures into dark areas – and in some appearances, it's even a weapon.

POWER GLOVE
■ No, it's not a dodgy NES controller – this gauntlet grants Link the strength to pick up boulders as large as he is.

ZORA'S FLIPPERS
■ These are incredibly useful items – they let Link swim and allow him to make use of the Zora's special shortcuts.

MAGIC MIRROR
■ When Link visits the Dark World in *A Link To The Past*, this item gives him the power of instantly returning to his own world.

MAGIC CAPE
■ This useful item turns Link invisible as long as it's being worn – just be careful not to let your magic meter deplete.

BOMBOS MEDALLION
■ This magical charm allows Link to perform an enormously powerful fire attack sufficient to kill most enemies.

ETHER MEDALLION
■ When used, this medallion will helpfully freeze every enemy on screen. It's also useful to stop the rain, if you need to.

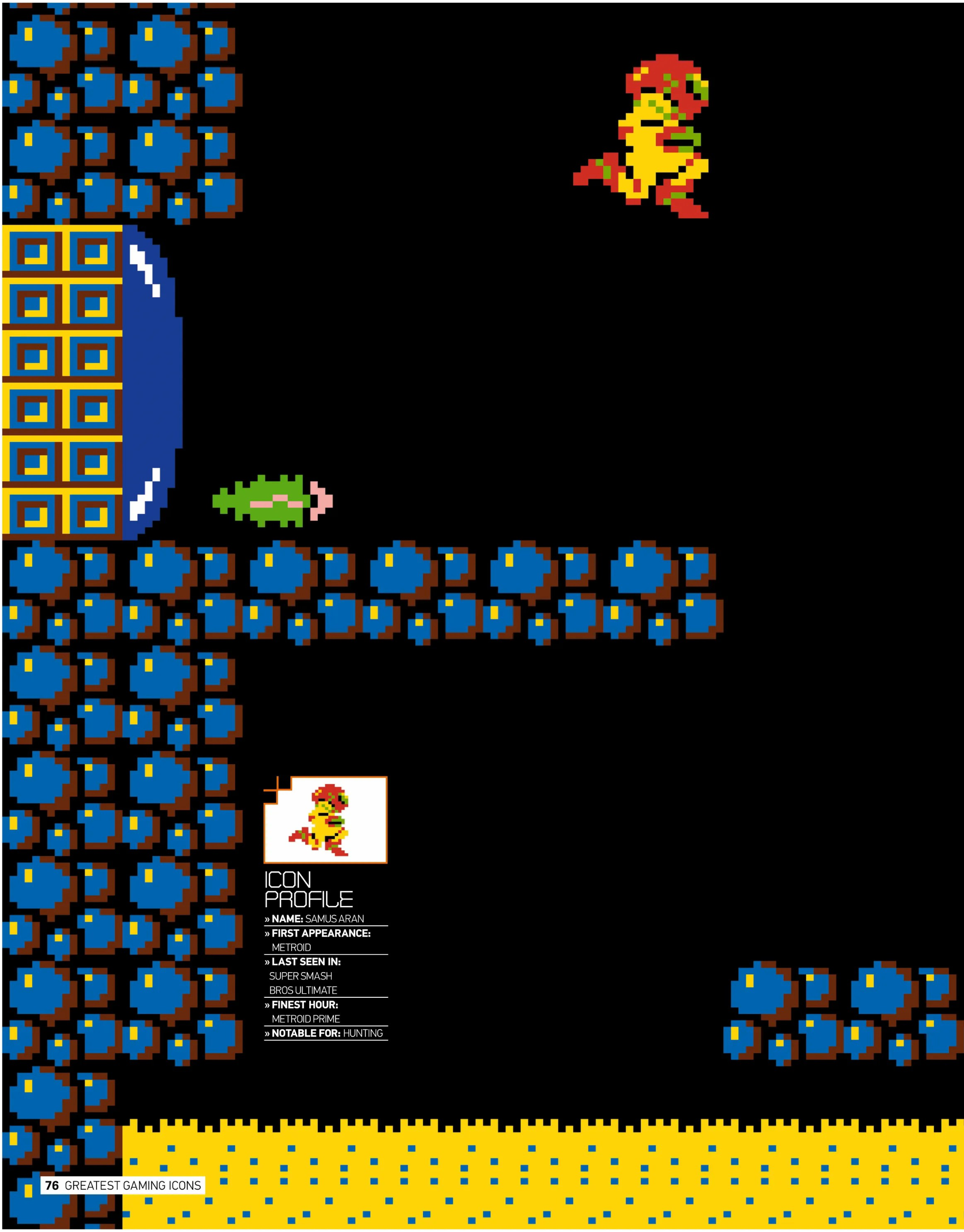
QUAKE MEDALLION
■ As you might have guessed by the name, this medallion enables Link to cause enormous earthquakes at will.

BOTTLE
■ Bottles aren't a particularly glamorous item, but you need them to store potions, fairies and other highly useful things.

HEART CONTAINER
■ Definitely one of the most useful items you can find as it increases Link's health by a full heart, allowing him to survive longer.

RUPEES
■ Money can be exchanged for goods and services – and weirdly, can often be found at random when cutting grass.

MASTER SWORD
■ The sword of legend that has the power to seal Ganon away. This is always an upgrade over Link's default sword.



ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** SAMUS ARAN
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** METROID
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
- **» FINEST HOUR:** METROID PRIME
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** HUNTING

Metroid

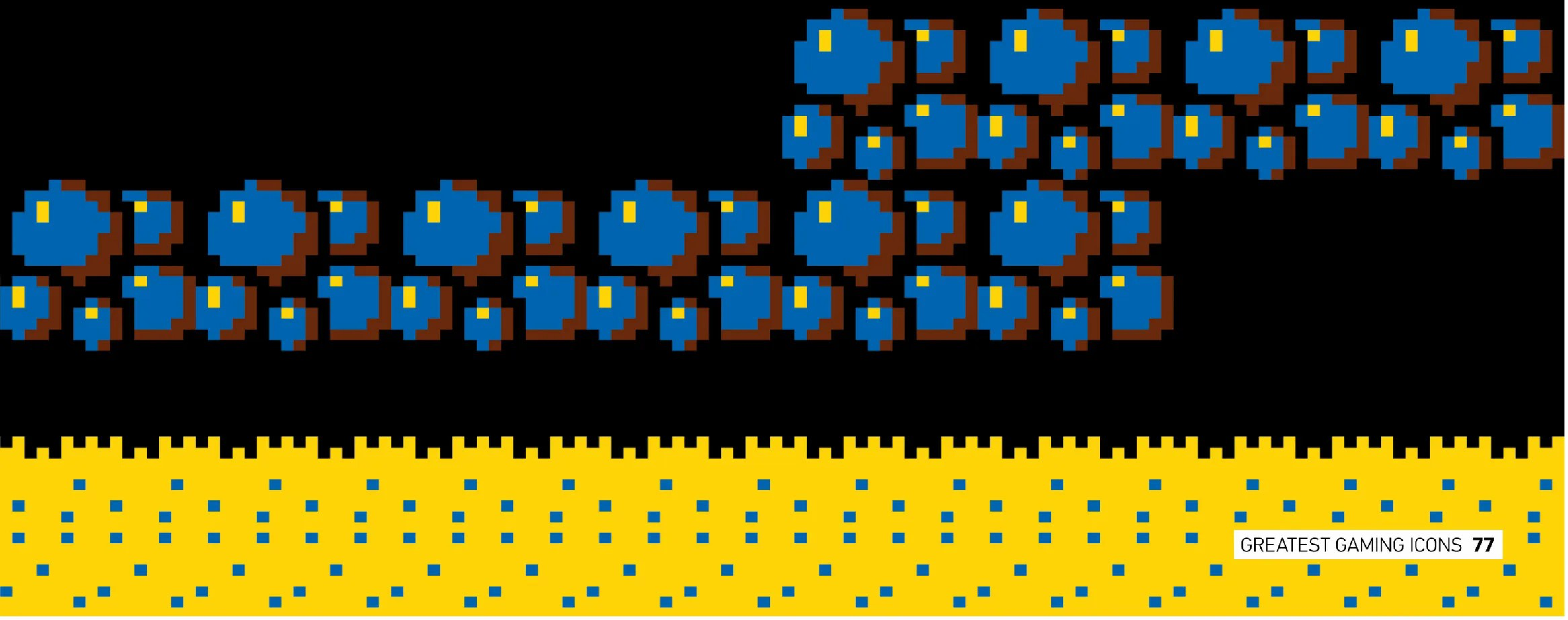
PROPER PRONOUNS, PLEASE

» NES » 1986 » NINTENDO

I love the instruction manuals that come with NES games, because they're often a source of real weirdness. You don't really get this sort of thing anymore, because the games industry is a huge, global thing. There are 'brand bibles' and guidelines to make sure everyone is on message, and even if something did get changed, the internet would pounce on it within 15 seconds of the game's launch and there would be a huge argument about localisation (with some people erroneously calling it 'censorship'). But things were different back in the Eighties – if something was culturally unfamiliar, and things often were due to the Japanese origins of so many NES games, you could just rewrite the story and your audience would be none the wiser.

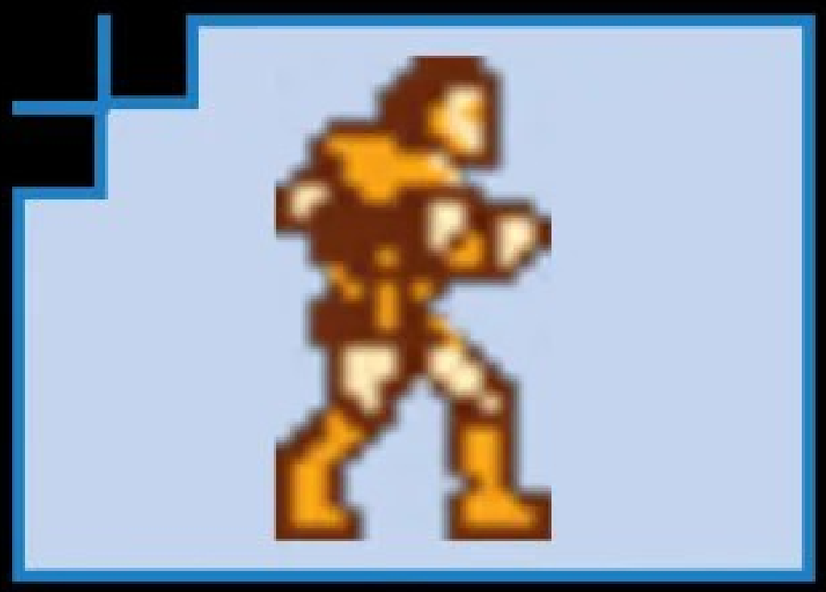
More often than not, I get the feeling that the people writing the manuals had pretty limited familiarity with the games they were writing about, too. If you need an example, *Metroid* is one of my favourites. Quite a lot of the story is actually related accurately when compared to the original story, but when we get to the subject of Samus, the manual gets things somewhat wrong. "He is the greatest of all the space hunters," it tells us. "He is a cyborg: his entire body has been surgically strengthened with robotics, giving him superpowers." This doesn't sound quite like the Samus we know, does it?

Of course, if you beat it quickly enough, the big secret revealed at the end of *Metroid* is that – *whisper it* – Samus is a woman. Now, you could argue that the manual's author was trying to save the surprise. But would it really surprise you if that person had just read the Japanese manual, which doesn't specify Samus' gender, and just made the assumption that the hero was a dude? Nintendo Of America wasn't the massive entity that it is today, so there's every chance that nobody there had cleared the game in under five hours to know the truth. *



SIMON BELMONT

Konami's original whip wielder has appeared in more Castlevania games than any other hero. He's also had the greatest number of hair colours



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** SIMON BELMONT
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** VAMPIRE KILLER
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** WHIPPING THINGS

As the first protagonist to appear in a *Castlevania* game, and the most prolific of the series' heroes, Simon Belmont has become synonymous with videogame vampire slaying. He's one of the most memorable personalities of the NES era and has been adopted into the wider culture of gaming as a whole.

Despite his popularity, little is known about Simon's origin, either in the story of the game or the context of his design. His first appearance was in the 1986 MSX release *Vampire Killer*, for which one F Hayakawa is credited as the art designer. The game itself is virtually bereft of any narrative, but the synopsis on the back of the box reveals that Simon acquired his magical whip from his father – a detail expanded on in future games as we learn that the whip, also called Vampire Killer, is a family heirloom that passes between generations of Belmonts and links many of the protagonists of the different *Castlevania* games.

Simon's next appearance was in the smash NES title *Castlevania*. Rather than being a sequel, it was a remake of the MSX original – a retelling of the story but with slightly different gameplay and graphics. This strange fact is one that can actually be applied to almost all of Simon's appearances throughout the *Castlevania* series. Subsequent releases, *Haunted Castle* (Arcade), *Super Castlevania IV* (SNES), *Akumajou Dracula* (X68000) and *Castlevania Chronicles* (PSone) are all set in 1691 but feature variations on the gameplay.

One of the most unusual repercussions of *Vampire Killer*'s cross-platform retellings is the way Simon's visual design altered with each iteration. There was no guideline for Simon's look, so in each game he was almost unrecognisable from the last. His build, his clothing and even his hair would change.

With the release of PSone's *Castlevania Chronicles* – itself an enhanced port of the X68000 game – in 2001 a standard design was locked down. The concept art for the release was drawn by Ayami Kojima, who helped re-invigorate the franchise with *Symphony Of The Night*, and Simon's red hair and brown leather clothing became the definitive look.

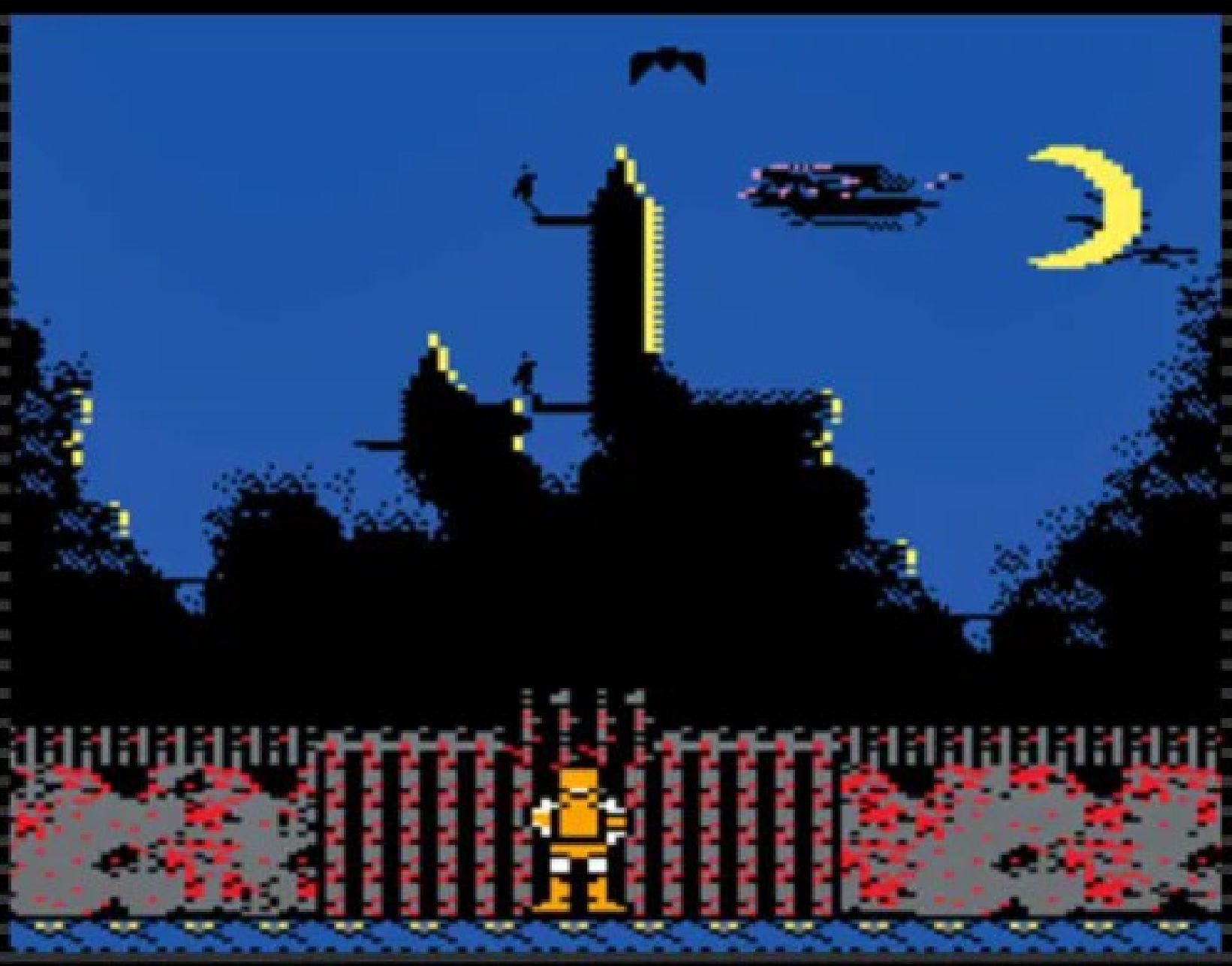
A year after *Chronicles*' release, in the run up to the debut of GBA game *Harmony Of Dissonance*, new *Castlevania* producer Koji Igarashi wrote a new timeline for the series, which immediately became the official canonical story for the series' complex narrative. In this timeline, several previous games were wiped from the canon and with them much of Simon Belmont's established history was rendered irrelevant. The only Simon games now considered canonical are the NES version of *Castlevania* and its direct sequel, *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest*. Not even the fan-favourite *Super Castlevania IV* would be considered an official part of the overall story.

> **"Simon's betrothed is snatched away by Dracula, leaving Belmont standing alone in a wedding suit"**

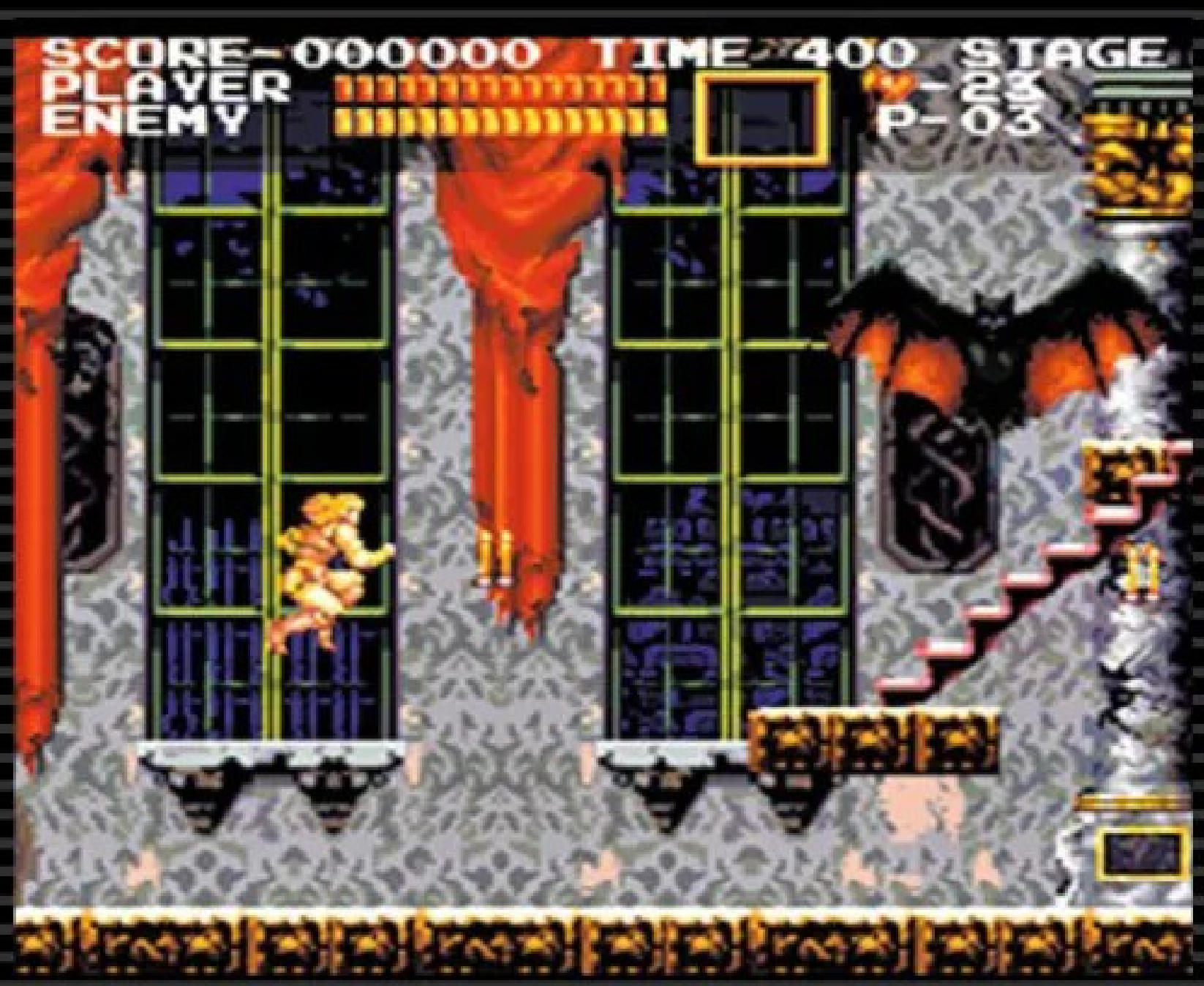
The biggest change to come from Igarashi's re-write was the removal of *Haunted Castle* from the timeline. This obscure arcade game (recently seen in Konami's *Anniversary Collection: Arcade Classics*) is one of the lesser-known *Castlevanias*, but also the one that offered the most insight into Simon's back story. In fact, the most memorable part of the game is the opening cut-scene in which Simon's betrothed is snatched away by Dracula, leaving Belmont standing alone in an uncharacteristic white wedding suit.

With each entry in the *Castlevania* series gradually adding more layers of depth to the franchise's mythology, we can only hope that Igarashi will one day leave the dark and moody cast of the latest games and build a new title around Simon Belmont, finally giving him the background and personality he's been lacking for years. He certainly deserves it after everything he's gone through! ✱

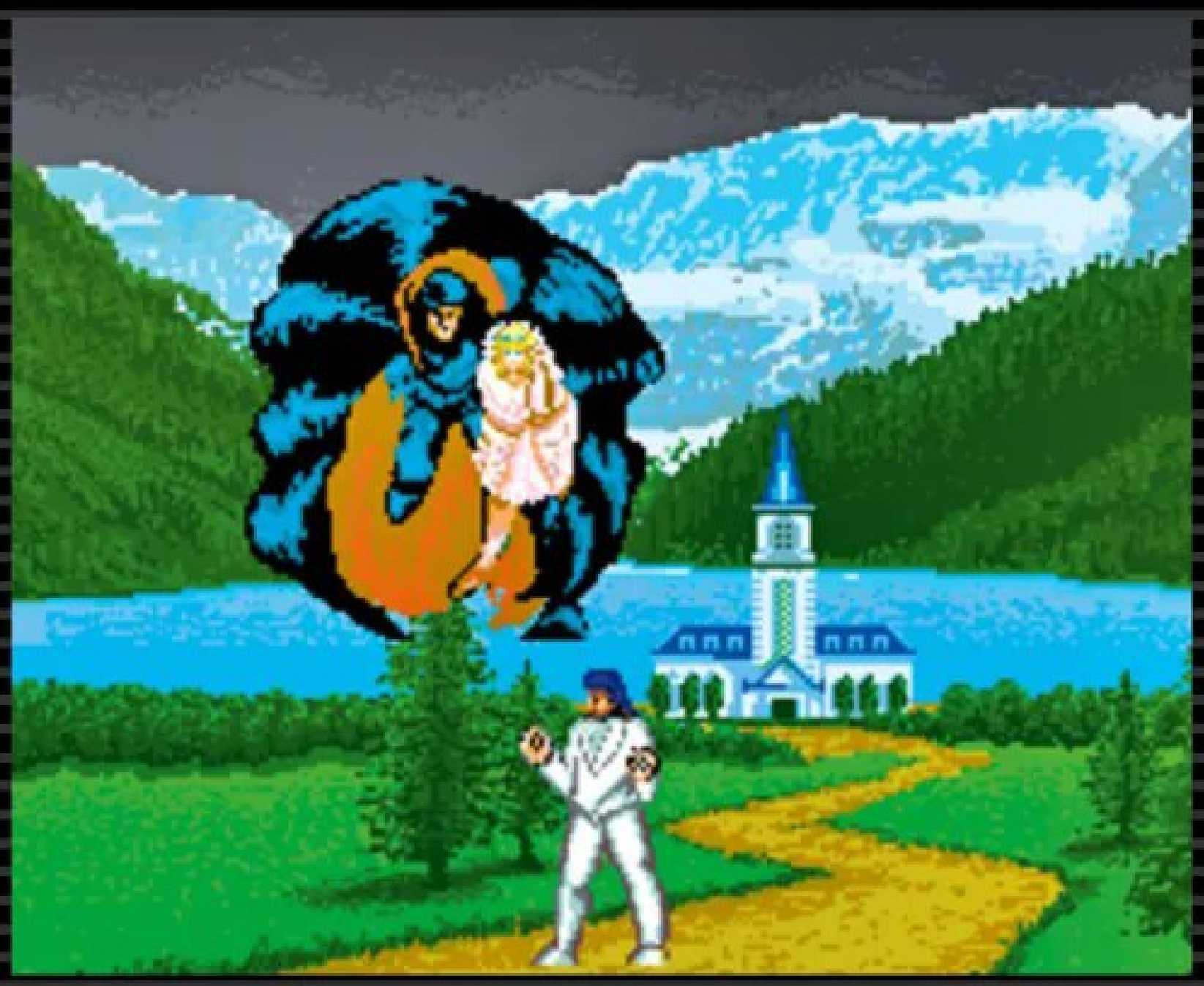
> MAGIC MOMENTS



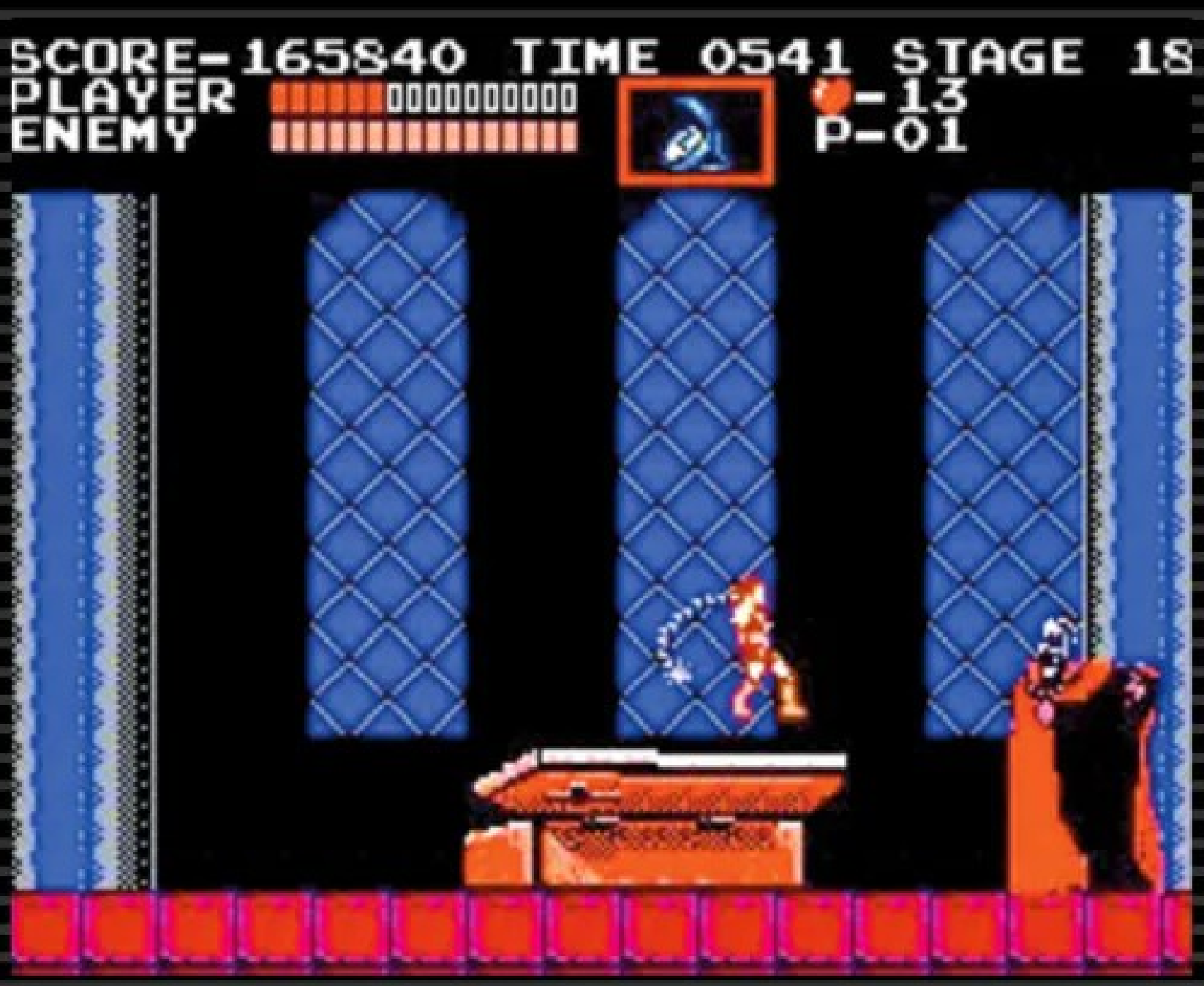
■ The iconic scene in which Simon approaches the gates to *Castlevania*.



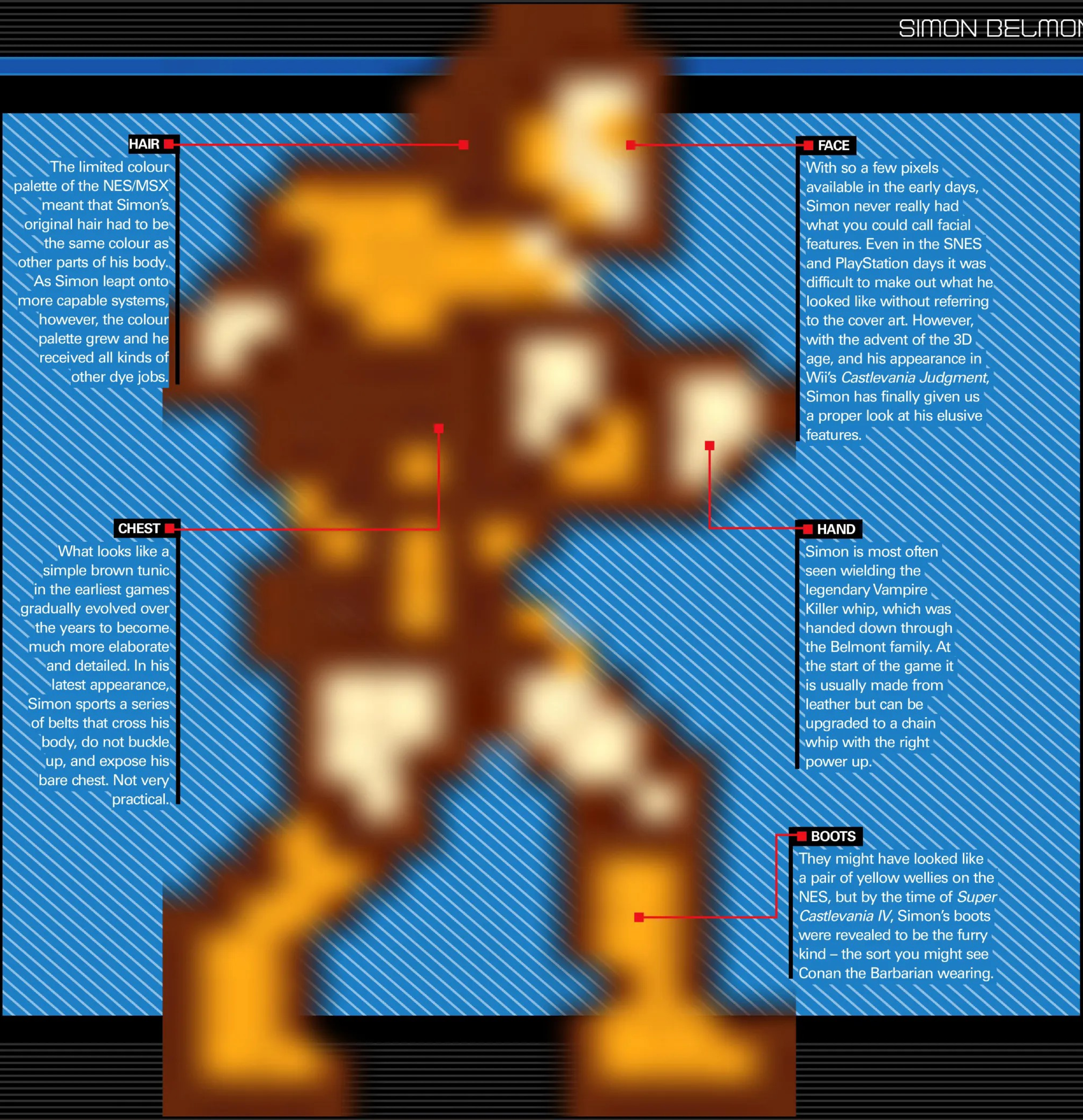
■ The very first boss that Simon meets: a huge vampire bat.



■ Simon's wife is snatched away from him in the introduction to *Haunted Castle*.



■ The first of many battles against Count Dracula, from his first NES game.



HAIR
The limited colour palette of the NES/MSX meant that Simon's original hair had to be the same colour as other parts of his body. As Simon leapt onto more capable systems, however, the colour palette grew and he received all kinds of other dye jobs.

FACE
With so a few pixels available in the early days, Simon never really had what you could call facial features. Even in the SNES and PlayStation days it was difficult to make out what he looked like without referring to the cover art. However, with the advent of the 3D age, and his appearance in Wii's *Castlevania Judgment*, Simon has finally given us a proper look at his elusive features.

CHEST
What looks like a simple brown tunic in the earliest games gradually evolved over the years to become much more elaborate and detailed. In his latest appearance, Simon sports a series of belts that cross his body, do not buckle up, and expose his bare chest. Not very practical.

HAND
Simon is most often seen wielding the legendary Vampire Killer whip, which was handed down through the Belmont family. At the start of the game it is usually made from leather but can be upgraded to a chain whip with the right power up.

BOOTS
They might have looked like a pair of yellow wellies on the NES, but by the time of *Super Castlevania IV*, Simon's boots were revealed to be the furry kind – the sort you might see Conan the Barbarian wearing.

SCORE 000004700
PLAYER
ENEMY
BLOCK 6-1
♥=25 P=04
TIME 452

■ Simon swings for his life as SNES's Mode 7 effects turn the whole room upside down.

■ Simon was a playable character in the little-known *DreamMix TV World Fighters*.

■ The *Castlevania*-themed event from *New International Track & Field* on DS.

SIMON
58
ALUCARD
99 HITs

■ In Wii's *Castlevania Judgment*, Simon crosses timelines to confront other heroes.

WHIP BEARERS

Not every character in the Castlevania series is a Belmont and not all of them have carried the Vampire Killer whip. And to make matters even more confusing, the game's timeline doesn't follow the order in which they were released. Allow us to explain as we unravel the timeline of the whip and show where it all began

1094

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

■ Leon Belmont acquires the Whip of Alchemy from Rinaldo Gandolfi and the whip is later fused with the soul of Leon's fiancée to create the Vampire Killer: a weapon capable of destroying Dracula and other demons of the undead.

1476

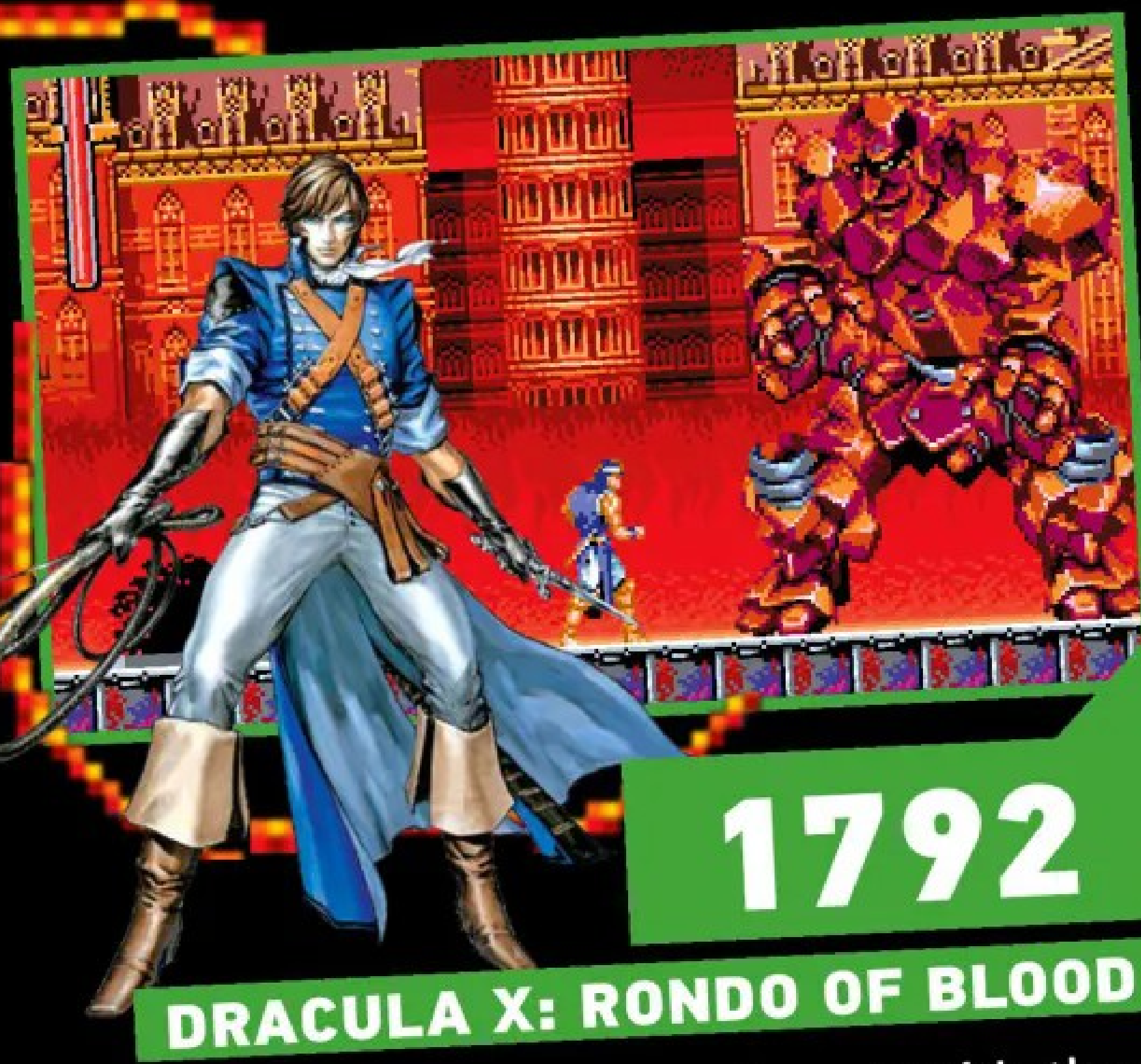
CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE

■ The whip is handed down between Leon's descendents until it reaches Trevor Belmont. Trevor becomes the first person to kill Dracula using the legendary whip, along with the help of Grant Danasty, Sypha Belnades and Alucard.

1797

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

■ After being possessed by Shaft, and later uncursed by Alucard, Richter arranges to have his soul absorbed into the Vampire Killer to prepare for the rebirth of Dracula in 1999. From this point on, anyone who can defeat the memory of Richter will take control of the whip, even if they are not a Belmont.



1792

DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD

■ Richter Belmont sets out with the inherited Vampire Killer to rescue his loved ones from Dracula.

1852

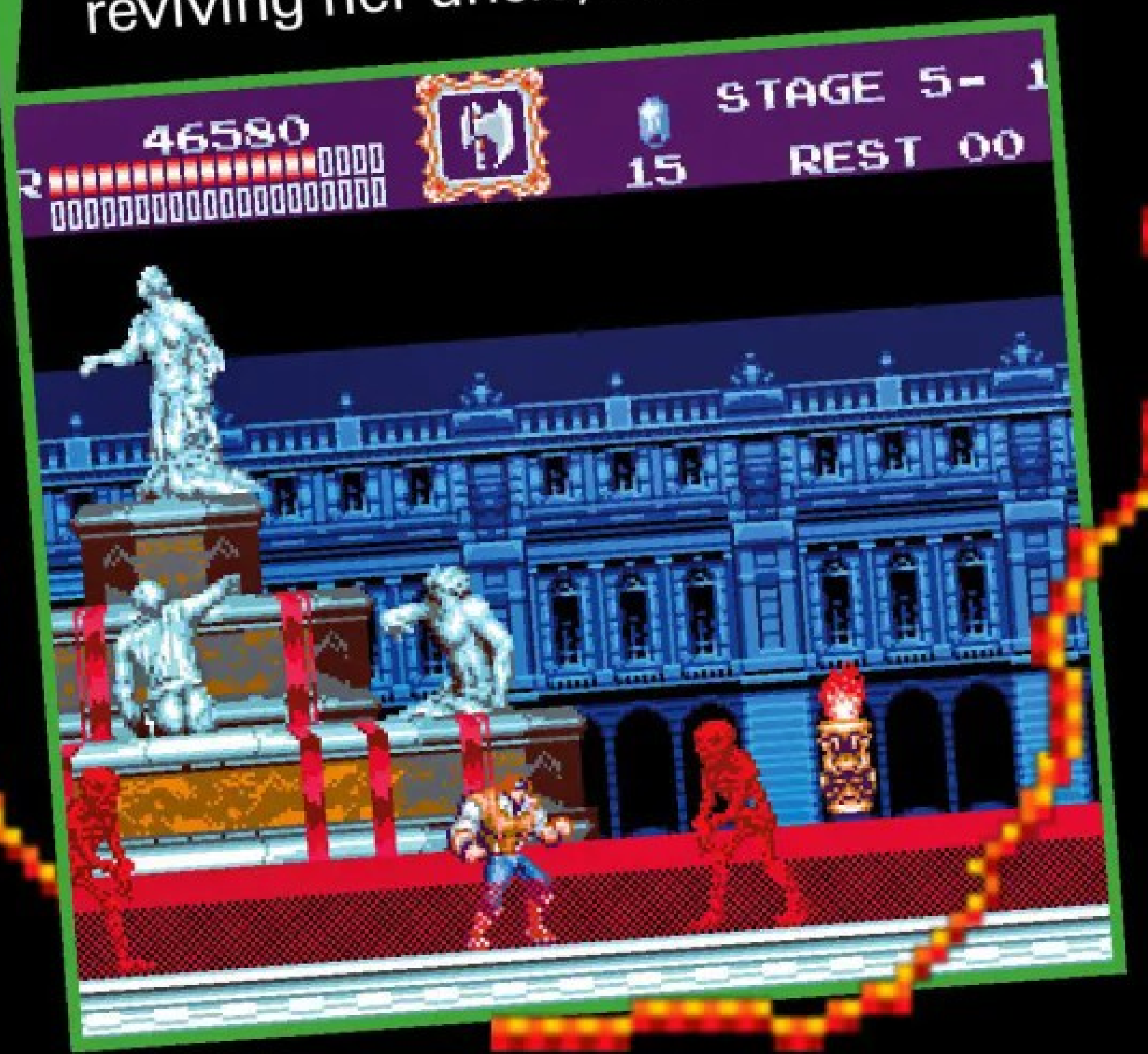
CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS

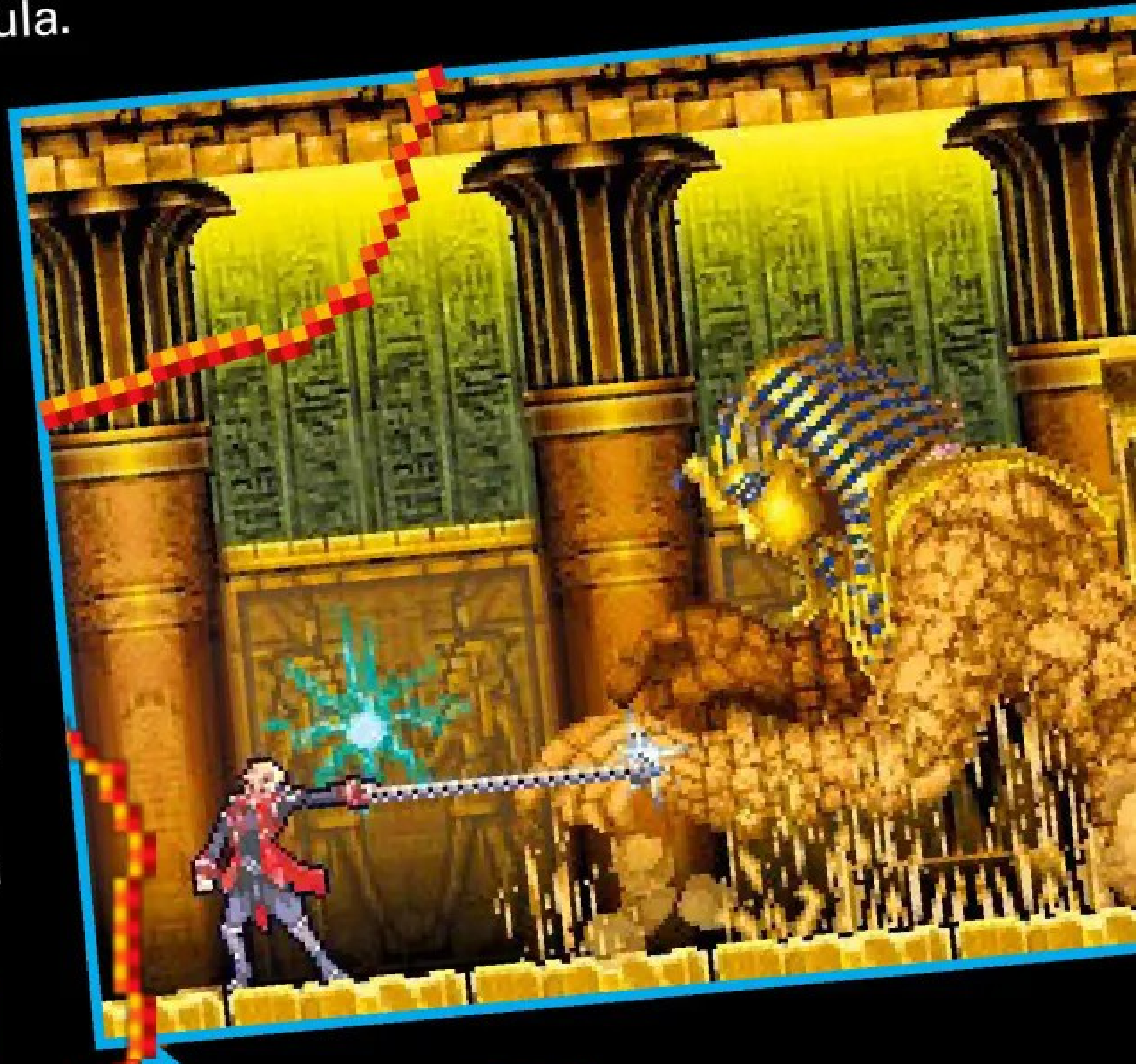
■ Michael Gelhart Schneider, a distant descendent of the Belmonts, comes into possession of the whip, but never actively uses it. Instead he trains his son Reinhardt to wield it and it is he who defeats Dracula in 1852.

1917

CASTLEVANIA: THE NEW GENERATION

■ The whip eventually finds its way into the hands of John Morris, son of Quincy Morris from Bram Stoker's original novel. John, along with Eric Lecarde stops Countess Bartley from reviving her uncle, Dracula.





1944

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

■ During World War II, John Morris's son Jonathan uses the Vampire Killer to defeat an evil vampire by the name of Brauner. His father never taught him how to unlock the full power of the whip, however, so he also uses other weapons while he works on upgrading the whip's potential.

1479

CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS

■ Trevor confronts Hector, an ex-forgemaster of Dracula's, but soon comes to realise that they are on the same side and agrees to help him. Trevor is injured before the final encounter, however, and Hector is forced to fight Dracula alone.

1576

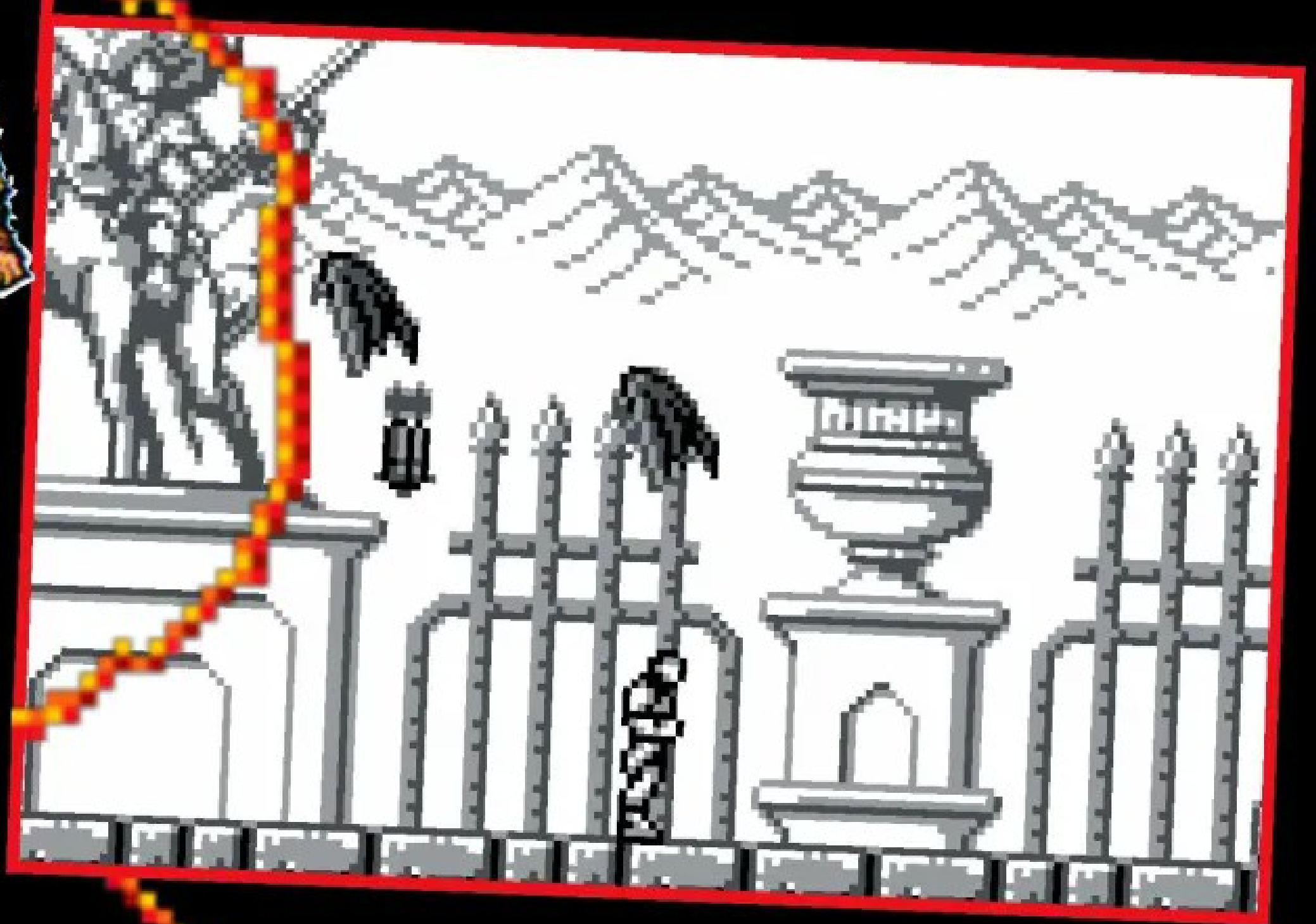
CASTLEVANIA ADVENTURE

■ Count Dracula rises from the dead in Transylvania, but is defeated, this time by Christopher Belmont, descendent of Trevor.

1591

CASTLEVANIA II: BELMONT'S REVENGE

■ Defeated but not quite dead, Dracula returns to kidnap Christopher's son, Soleiyu, and turns him into a demon. Christopher eventually defeats the Count, however, and manages to return Soleiyu to human form.



1691

CASTLEVANIA

■ The same old story. Dracula comes back from the dead, but a member of the Belmont family is waiting for him. This time it's Simon who sends Dracula back into darkness with the aid of the Vampire Killer.

1698

CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST

■ Simon sets out to free the land of Dracula's curse by finding and destroying each one of his remaining body parts. During the process, he accidentally revives Dracula but uses the Vampire Killer to defeat him for the final time.

1748

CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE

■ Juste Belmont, grandson of Simon, takes up the whip to fight his friend Maxim, who has become possessed by the spirit of Dracula.

1999

THE DEMON CASTLE WARS

■ The whip eventually works its way back to its owners when it is acquired by Julius Belmont. Julius kills Dracula once he is resurrected, as Nostradamus predicted. After his defeat, Dracula is sealed away within a solar eclipse to prevent him from returning from the dead, the Vampire Killer is buried along with Castlevania, and Julius loses his memory. Note: the Demon Castle Wars has not yet received a game of its own, but is expected to at some point in the future.

2035

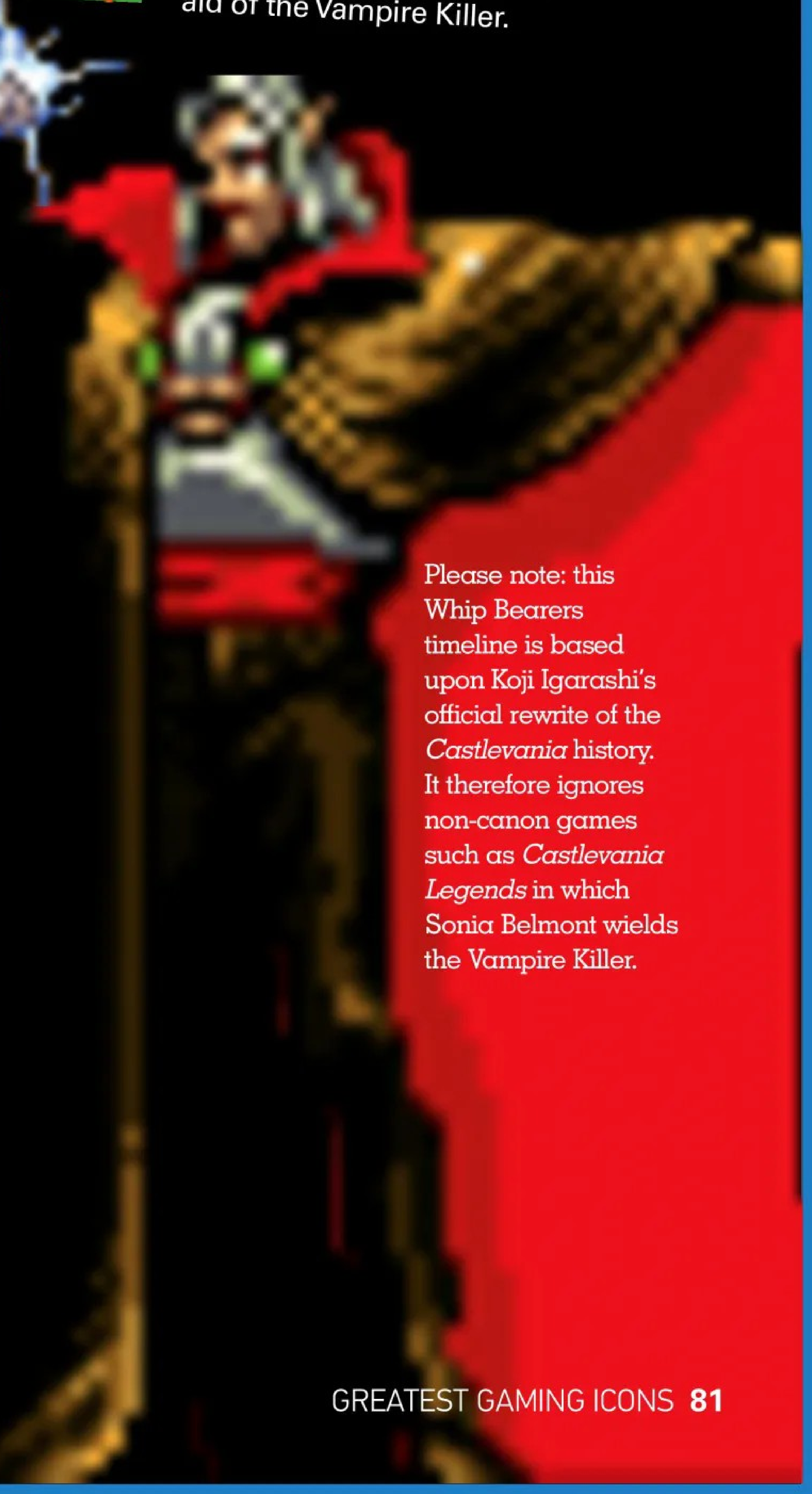
CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

■ Still suffering from amnesia, Julius finds himself in Dracula's castle when it unexpectedly arises. There he regains his memory and relocates the whip in order to fight Dracula's reincarnation, Soma Cruz. The pair eventually team up, however, when it becomes apparent that Cruz is one of the good guys.

2036

CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

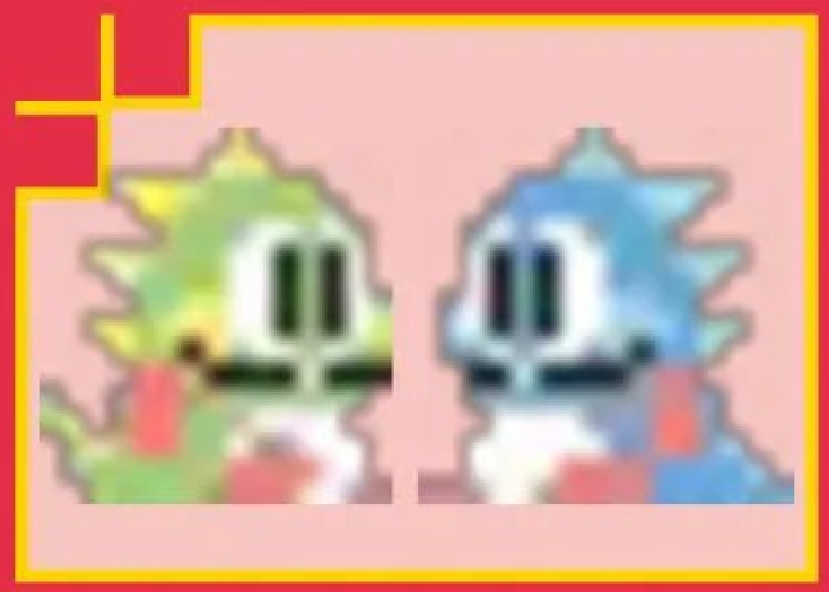
■ Julius helps Soma to defeat a cult that hopes to steal the power of Dracula from within Soma's soul.



Please note: this Whip Bearers timeline is based upon Koji Igarashi's official rewrite of the *Castlevania* history. It therefore ignores non-canon games such as *Castlevania Legends* in which Sonia Belmont wields the Vampire Killer.

BUB & BOB

Bubble Bobble's twin heroes work so well together, we couldn't bear to separate them. Here's all you need to know about the cute duo



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAMES:** BUB AND BOB
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** BUBBLE BOBBLE
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** BUBBLE BOBBLE FOR KAKAO
- » **FINEST HOUR:** BUBBLE SYMPHONY
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** BLOWING BUBBLES

Appearing in countless games over the past 33 years, Taito's Bub and Bob have a long and detailed back story. But it's one that we're not really prepared to go into here. In a series that fails to consistently agree with itself on the chronology of its own timeline, the *Bubble Bobble* titles have a narrative that would drive even the best historians mad if they tried to tie up the whole thing into a linear, cohesive arc. Even Stuart Campbell, one of the biggest sticklers for detail in games journalism, couldn't make sense of the whole series when he last covered it for **Retro Gamer** – his attempt to summarise the story eventually trailing off into nothingness as he tied himself up in knots.

Let's keep it simple: the original *Bubble Bobble* coin-op puts you in control of one of two little boys who have been transformed into dragons by something or other, and they must use that most classic of dragon abilities – blowing bubbles – to imprison any enemies they happen to encounter. As an early example of arcade gaming, the back story is far from integral to *Bubble Bobble*'s design. The gameplay – in this case, jumping on the bubbled enemies to burst them into oblivion before climbing to the top of the level – is the only thing that really matters. But that's not to say that the character design of Bub and Bob is totally unremarkable.

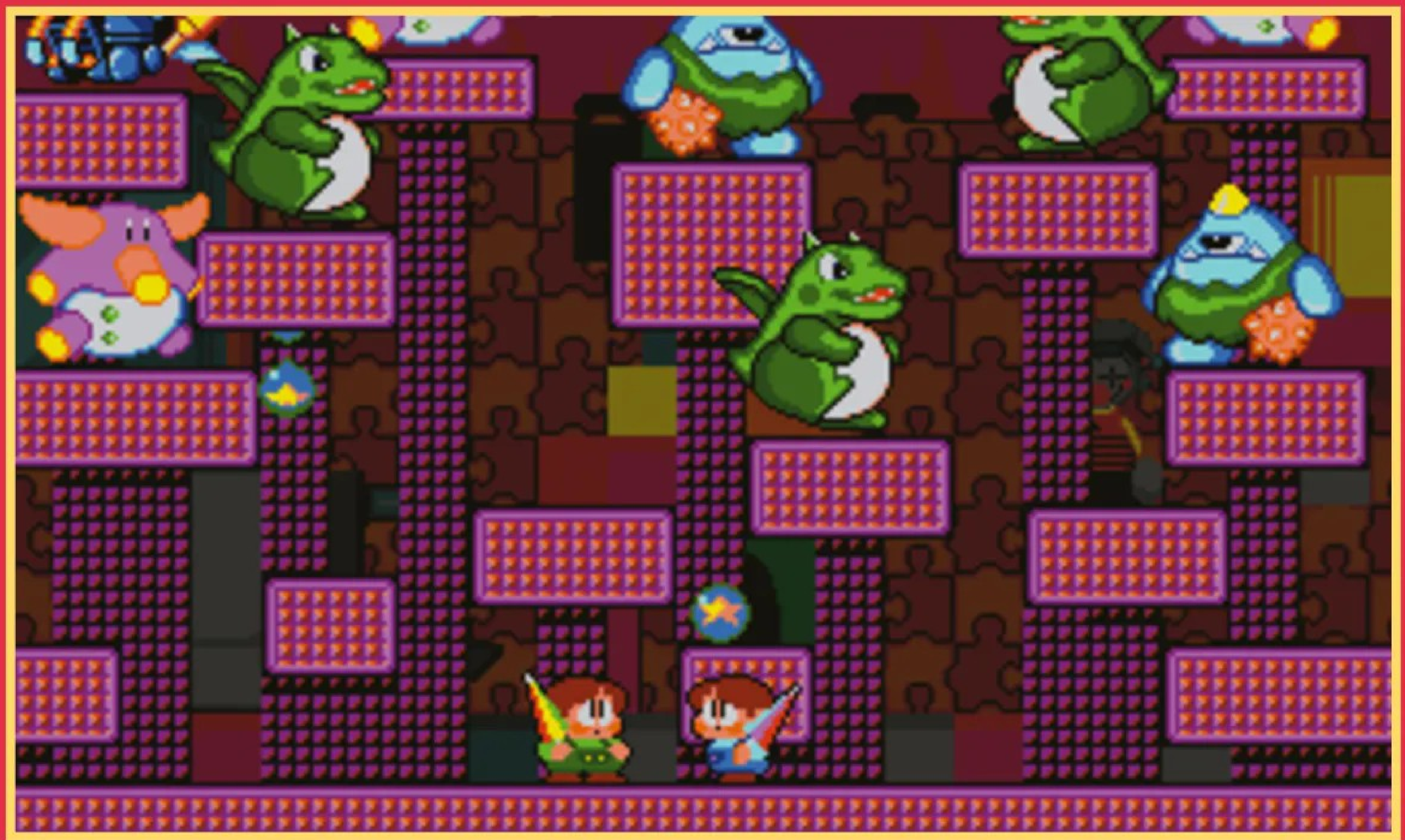
Whether the legend is true or not, *Bubble Bobble* is rather famous for being the first game designed with girlfriends in mind. The game's designer, Fukio 'MTJ' Mitsuji, spent a lot of time in Japanese 'game centres' in the Eighties and noticed a disturbing trend that is still prevalent today – boys staring mesmerised into coin-op screens as their girlfriends wait patiently, and bored, by their side. The obvious solution, he thought, was to create a game that those girlfriends could play alongside their boyfriends – the game bringing the pair together while cannily doubling Taito's takings in the process. To achieve this, Taito had to develop *Bubble Bobble* with two audiences in mind. Gamers would flock to the cabinet to experience the challenge of beating 100 levels on one credit, and uncovering the game's surprising wealth of secrets (of which there are many). The gamers' partners, meanwhile, were convinced to join in by fun and accessible gameplay and the visual design of those two loveable little protagonists.

Designed using a 16x16 pixel grid and only four colours each, Bub and Bob are a great example of pixel art in the 8-bit age. Every square matters and each is used to create one of the cutest characters ever to peer out from behind an ancient raster monitor. So cute in fact that the brothers did exactly what Taito hoped: they attracted gamers to arcades in droves to play one of the original and best co-op platformers.

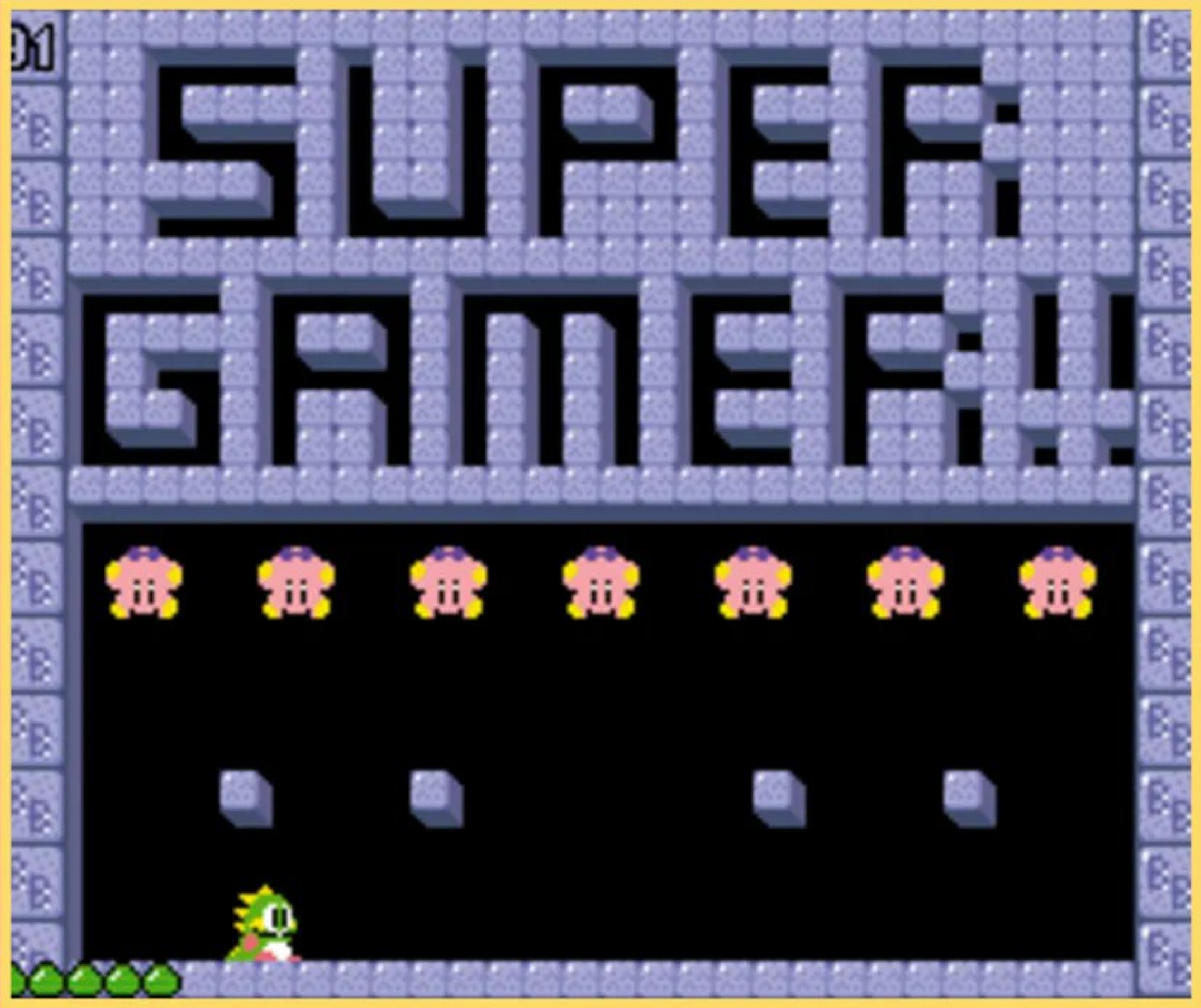
Bubble Bobble wasn't just a game; it was a phenomenon that spawned countless home conversions and arcade sequels, each one taking Bub and Bob on a new adventure. And that's where the character designs took a strange turn. The first sequels, *Rainbow Islands* and *Parasol Stars*, regressed the brothers back to their previously unseen human forms. Though technically cute, with big wide eyes and super-deformed proportions, the human Bub and Bob lacked the charm of their dragon personae and almost had a scary porcelain doll quality to them. If not for the fact that *Rainbow Islands* and *Parasol Stars* were both excellent games then they just wouldn't be as fondly remembered as *Bubble Bobble*.

The human Bub and Bob never appeared in the series again, except for a few *Rainbow Islands* remakes and the bizarre PSP exclusive *Bubble Bobble Evolution*, in which the boys appear in dragon costumes and use a trumpet to blow bubbles. *Bubble Symphony* (1994) and *Bubble Memories* (1995) returned both to the classic gameplay of the original arcade hit and the classic design of the sibling dragons.

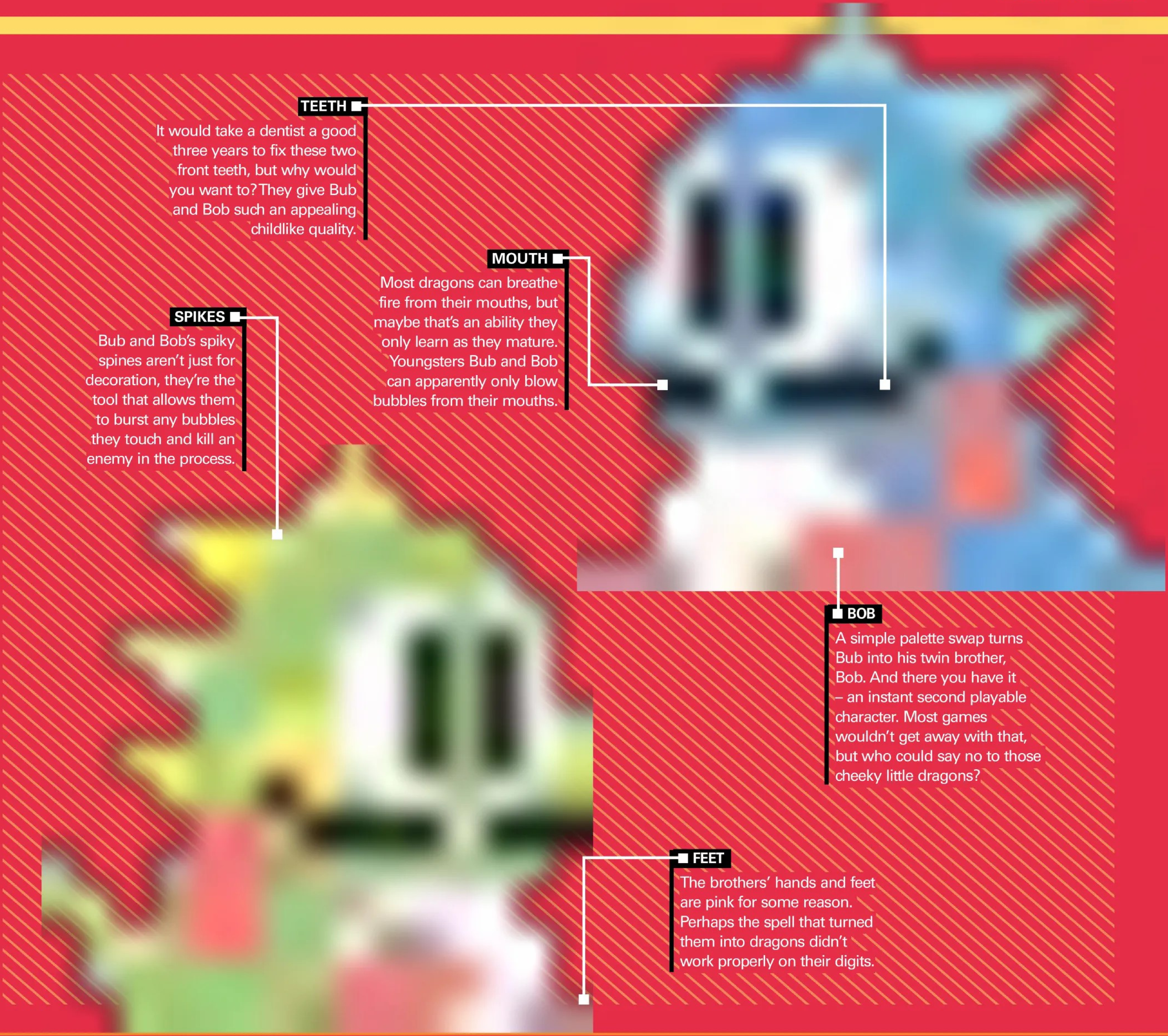
What remains most baffling about the two characters credited with broadening the very user base of arcade games is that Taito has never really milked their likenesses on merchandise to the same extent as Nintendo and Namco did with their Eighties mascots. Happily for gamers, however, their legacy can be found in even more adorable yet playable arcade platformers. *The New Zealand Story* and *Liquid Kids* both followed in its footsteps with equally likeable characters and fun-loving personality while other developers followed with the likes of *Rodland* and *Snow Bros* – all great games that arguably wouldn't have been made were it not for the success of *Bubble Bobble*. Which, don't forget, was successful in part because of the 'eat 'em up with a spoon' loveability of Bub and Bob. ✱



■ *Parasol Stars* was a fun addition to the series that was released on numerous systems including the PC Engine.



■ Level 91 uses clever level design to reward the player for getting so far.



TEETH
It would take a dentist a good three years to fix these two front teeth, but why would you want to? They give Bub and Bob such an appealing childlike quality.

MOUTH
Most dragons can breathe fire from their mouths, but maybe that's an ability they only learn as they mature. Youngsters Bub and Bob can apparently only blow bubbles from their mouths.

SPIKES
Bub and Bob's spiky spines aren't just for decoration, they're the tool that allows them to burst any bubbles they touch and kill an enemy in the process.

BOB
A simple palette swap turns Bub into his twin brother, Bob. And there you have it – an instant second playable character. Most games wouldn't get away with that, but who could say no to those cheeky little dragons?

FEET
The brothers' hands and feet are pink for some reason. Perhaps the spell that turned them into dragons didn't work properly on their digits.

> MAGIC MOMENTS

1UP
12570
HIGH SCORE
100000
GOAL IN

■ Each *Rainbow Islands* level ends with a treasure chest full of sweets as a reward.

■ *Parasol Stars* kept the human designs but replaced rainbows with umbrellas.

■ The intro to *Bubble Symphony* shows just how much Taito loves designing tiny cute characters.

00069040
PUSH START
NEXT
LEVEL-4
PUSH 2P
CREDITS 02

■ *Puzzle Bobble* took the series in a popular new direction. But why are there two Bubs on screen?

READY
Round 396
WON!
LOST
NEXT
LIGHT TOWER
STEAM TRAIN

THE HISTORY OF BUB & BOB

Left to right: [ROW 1] Bubble Bobble (1986) Multi / Rainbow Islands (1987) Multi / **Parasol Stars** (1991) Multi / Bubble Bobble Part 2 (1993) NES/ Game Boy **[ROW 2] Bubble Symphony** (1994) Arcade, Saturn / Puzzle Bobble (1994) Multi / **Bubble Memories** (1995) Arcade / Puzzle Bobble 2 (1995) Multi / **Puzzle Bobble 3** (1996) Multi **[ROW 3]** Puzzle Bobble 4 (1997) Multi / **Puzzle Bobble Mini** (1999) Neo Geo Pocket / Puzzle Bobble Millennium (2000) Game Boy Color / **Super Puzzle Bobble** (2000) Multi **[ROW 4]** Super Puzzle Bobble 2 (2002) PS2 / **Puzzle Bobble Vs** (2003) N-Gage / Bubble Bobble Revolution (2005) DS / **Rainbow Islands Revolution** (2005) DS / Hippatte Puzzle Bobble (2005) DS **[ROW 5] Ultra Puzzle Bobble Online** (2004) Xbox / Bubble Bobble Evolution (2006) PSP / **Bubble Bobble Double Shot** (2007) DS / Rainbow Islands Evolution (2007) PSP / **Bust-A-Move Bash!** (2007) Wii / Space Puzzle Bobble (2008) DS **[ROW 6] Bubble Bobble Plus!** (2009) Wii / Bubble Bobble Neo (2009) Xbox 360 / **Rainbow Islands Towering Adventure** (2009) Wii / Puzzle Bobble Plus (2009) Wii

ALEX KIDD

Mistreated by Sega but adored by its fans: we pay tribute to Alex Kidd – the mop-haired monkey-boy who was usurped by a hedgehog

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** ALEX KIDD
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** ALEX KIDD IN SHINOBI WORLD
- » **FINEST HOUR:** ALEX KIDD IN MIRACLE WORLD
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** PLAYING ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

While *Fantasy Zone*'s Opa-Opa, an ovoid spaceship with wings and legs, is considered Sega's first true videogame mascot, it wasn't until the arrival of Alex Kidd that the developer could be seen to create a versatile all-purpose hero to lead the Sega brand into its first console war. Seeing the popularity that Mario was garnering for Nintendo, Sega understandably wanted someone more comparable; while Opa slotted quite comfortably into shoot-'em-ups, there was a chance he might have struggled if shoehorned into other game genres. Through Alex Kidd, Sega sought to create its own Mario-style hero, ostensibly made him younger and gave him a motorcade of vehicular power-ups to appear hipper and trendier than the middle-aged plumber that was fast becoming the face of Sega's biggest rival.

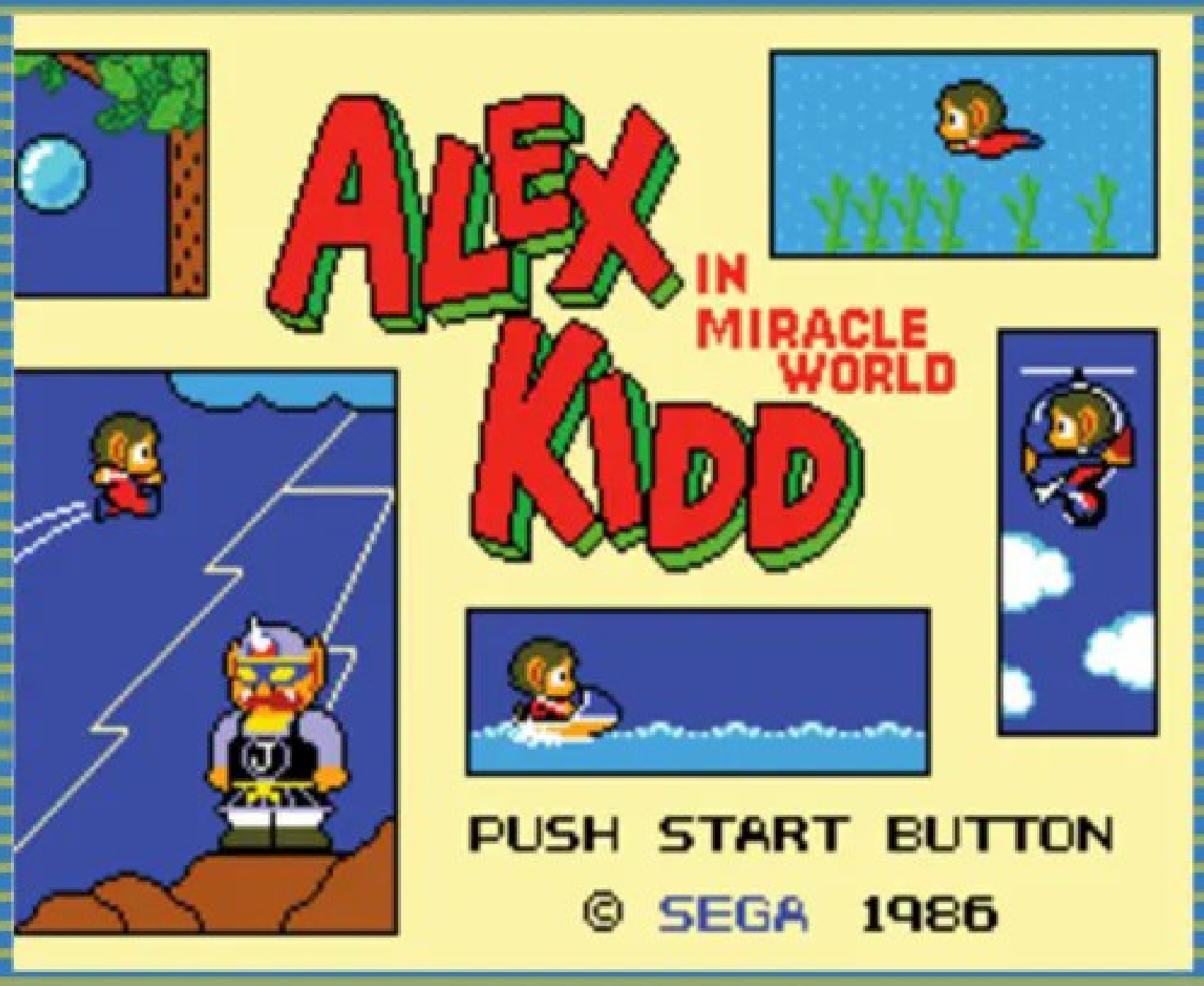
Like his Italian adversary, Alex was a fan of facial hair, his creator, Ossale Kohta, furnishing him with big bushy sideburns complemented by a giant mound of unkempt hair, giving Alex his famous monkey-like association. But unlike his rival, Alex was trained in Shellcore, an imaginary martial art that enabled him to increase the size and power of his fists at will, something arguably far more attention-grabbing for the average gamer than dispersing enemies by jumping on their heads.

After shooting to fame in 1986 with his videogame debut, *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*, Sega unwisely placed Alex in an awkward batch of sequels. As a result, while Alex became one of the first videogame characters to appear in differing genres – starring in platform games (*Miracle World*, *Alex Kidd: Lost Stars*), a racing title (*BMX Trial*), an adventure game (High-Tech World) and one of the earliest examples of a videogame mash-up with *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World* – he struggled to find a real identity, and it was almost as if Sega was simply using him to plug character-shaped holes in its games. This is certainly true for *Alex Kidd In High-Tech World*, which in Japan wasn't an *Alex Kidd* game at all but was instead based on a popular anime, and *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World*, which originally had a working title of *Shinobi Kid*. Similarly, outside of games, Alex's appearance differed greatly in the East and West. In Japanese box art and promotional material, Alex was depicted as a cute anime hero, while in the West he was portrayed as a teenager with big ears and bad hair. As we all know, Alex was eventually dropped in favour of a new mascot, and Sega struck gold with a blue 'needlemouse' named Sonic. When Sonic took over the mascot reigns, Alex's career was left in ruins. Sega had not only demoted Alex but wiped its hands of his creation entirely – a fact not lost on the publisher. It famously mocked the fact in the Dreamcast game *SGGG*, in which Alex makes a cameo appearance working in a videogame store where he spends his days lamenting his exploitation by Sega.

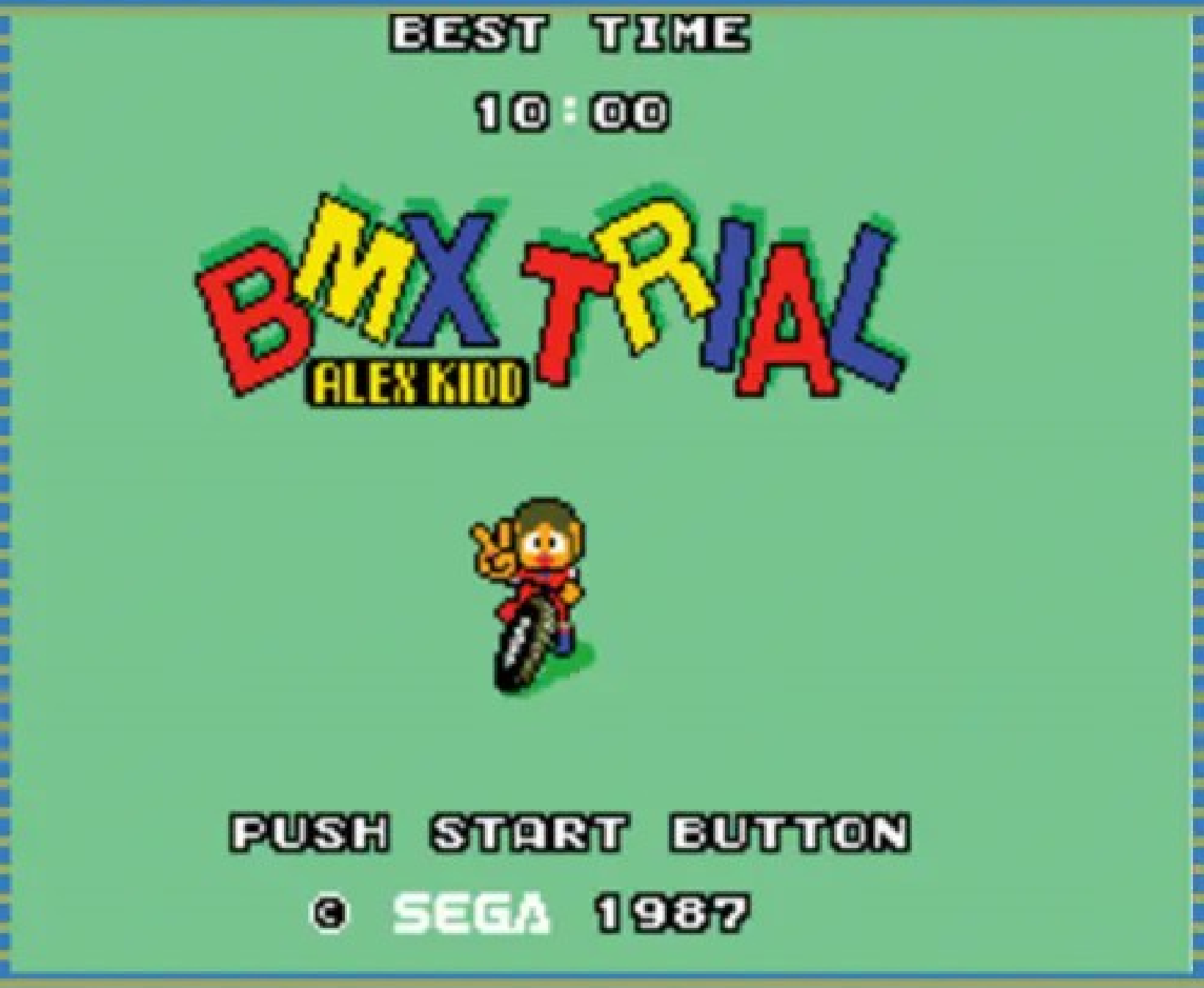
So why did Sonic succeed where Alex failed? And why did Sega quickly drop him? Well, we suspect that, as Sega's attitudes and stance towards videogames switched at the dawn of the Nineties, as the company tried to distance itself from Nintendo by producing more adult-oriented games for the Mega Drive (*Altered Beast* and *Streets Of Rage*, to name just two), so Alex began to look passé and redundant within the corporation. You need only play *Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle* for proof that Alex was starting to look dated even at the start of the 16-bit generation. Sega was quick to realise that Alex didn't fit with this edgier image it was trying to carve out for itself, and so a new mascot needed to be found straight away.

But while Alex's celebrity may not have reach the dizzying heights of Sonic, through his minor success and abject failings, at the hands of Sega, he did help the company finally understand the recipe to create a corporate mascot strong enough to stand up to the combined might of Mario and Nintendo. In Sonic, Sega was once again aiming to create a faster, trendier and cooler hero than its rival, something it had first set out to do with Alex Kidd; in the same way that Alex Kidd was a boy who resembled a monkey, Sonic basically represented the opposite approach – a hedgehog that resembled a boy. So while the 'hedgehog with attitude' was created to personify the new priorities of Sega, he also ironically carried a very similar sort of DNA within his cooler, more Nineties, blood. ✱

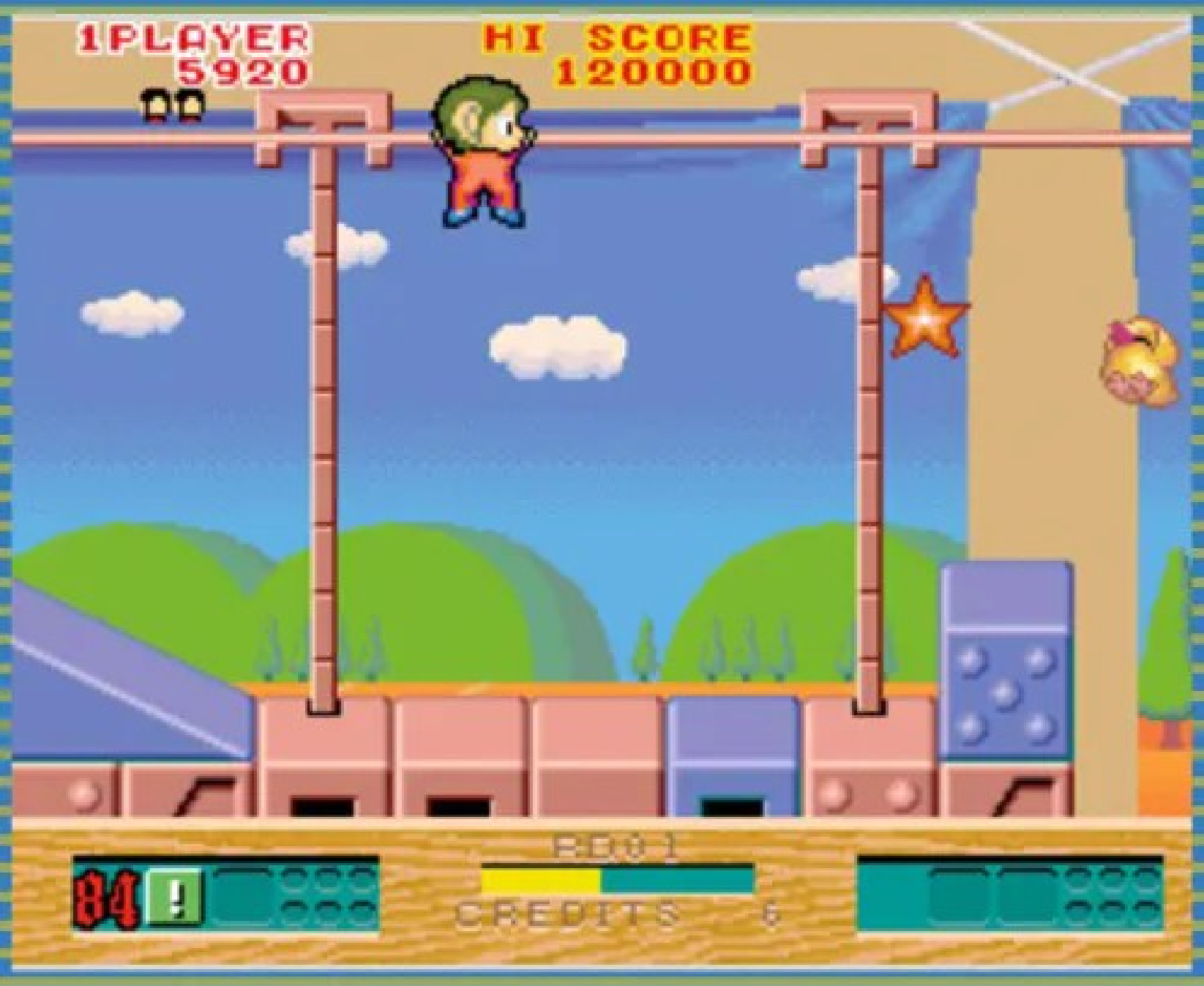
> MAGIC MOMENTS



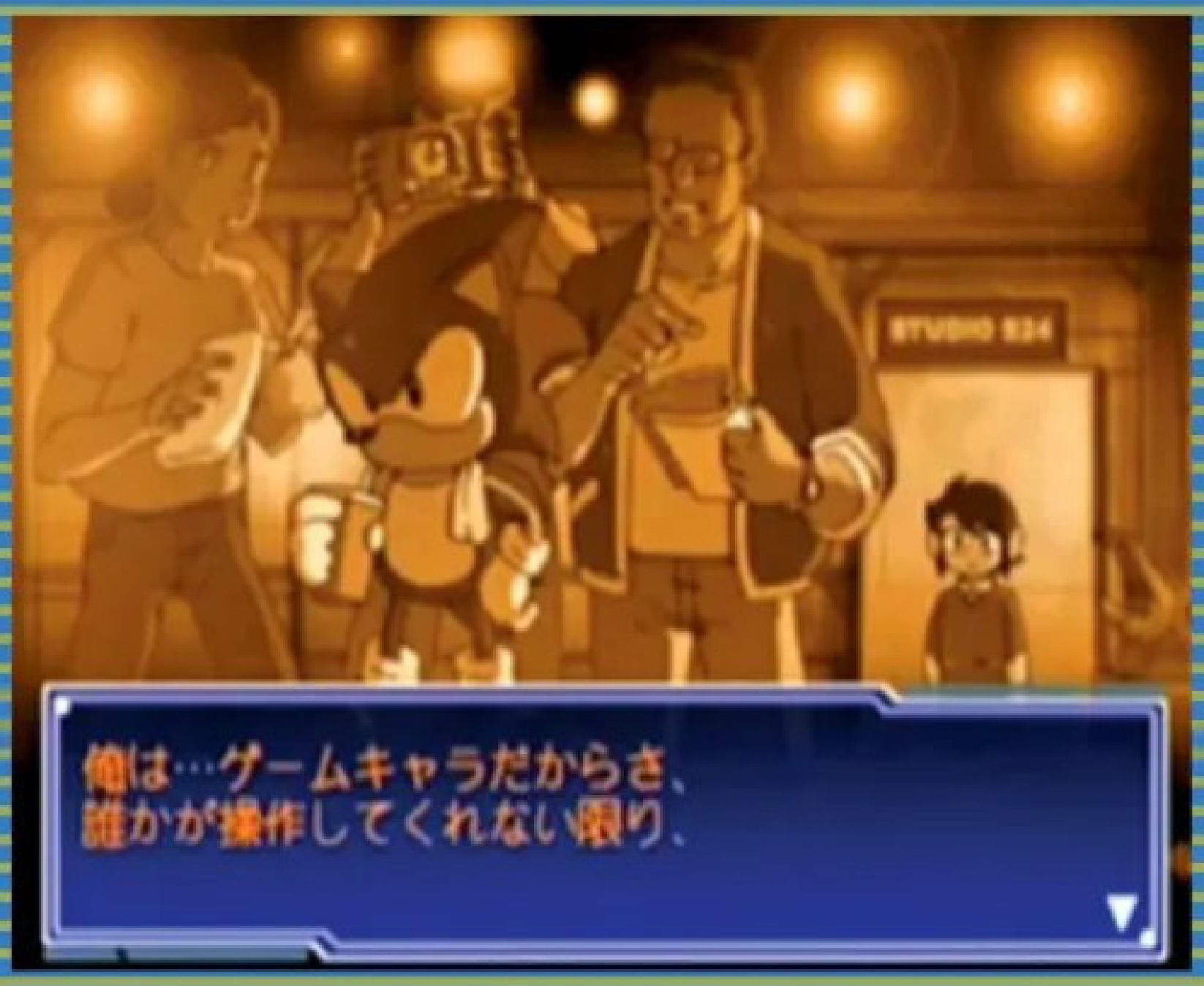
■ *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* is where it all started for our hero.



■ Alex gets to put his cycle skills to the test in the Japan-only *BMX Trial*.

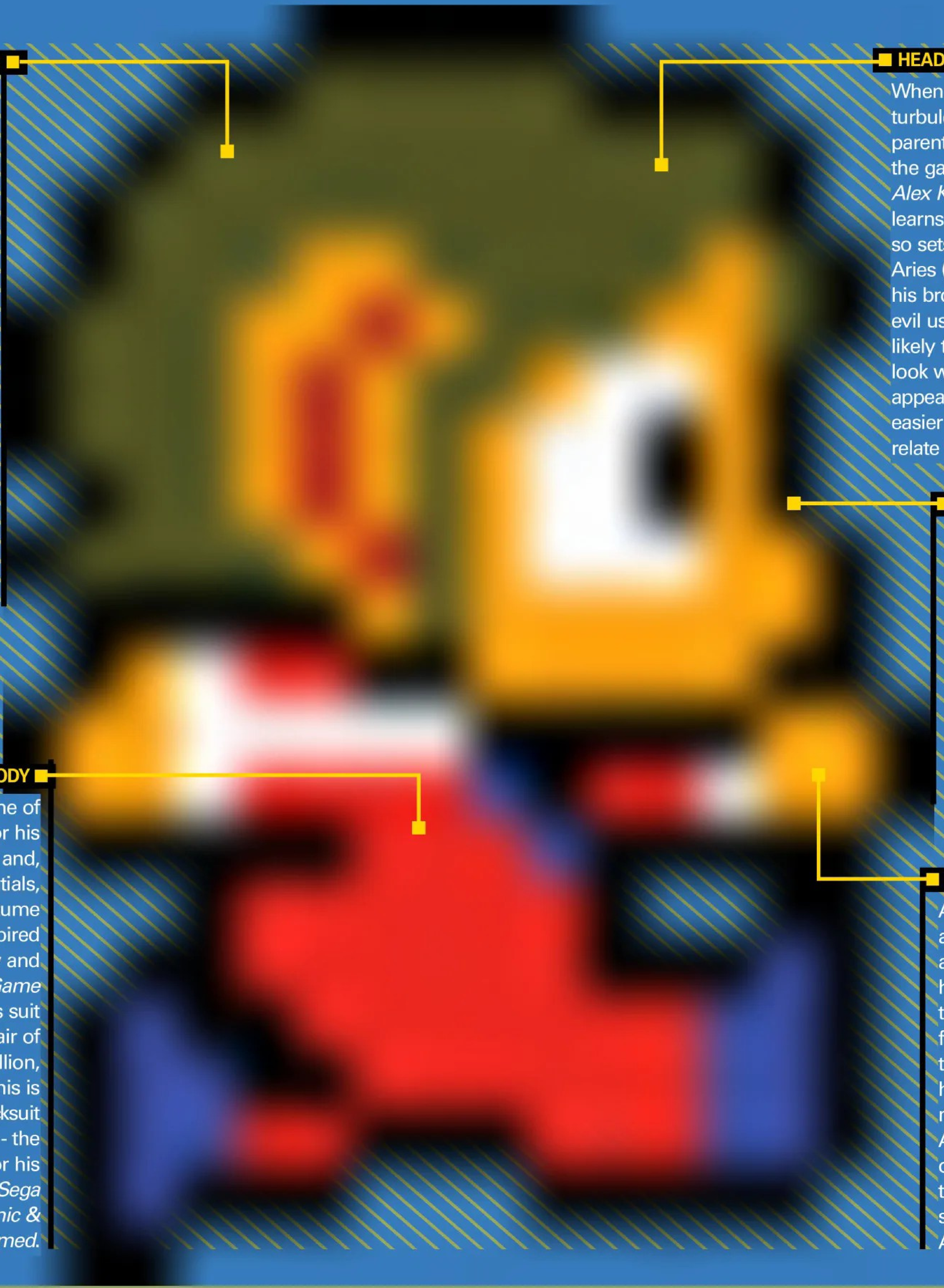


■ Alex's arcade debut came in the form of the platformer *Alex Kidd: The Lost Stars*.



俺は…ゲームキャラだからさ、
誰かが操作してくれない限り、

■ Alex cameos in *SGGG*, working in a game store and resenting Sega.



HAIR

It is Alex's big, round shock of brown hair that gives him his famous monkey-boy association. Conversely, to the very best of our knowledge, his monkey likeness has never been touched upon inside his games, so is likely just a bit of a coincidence. That said, it is possible Alex's simian appearance may have been loosely influenced by the classic Chinese fable *Journey To The West*, the legend that also inspired the cult Seventies television show *Monkey*.

BODY

As well as his large mane of hair, Alex is renowned for his trademark red jumpsuit and, given his martial arts credentials, we'd hazard a guess his costume may have been loosely inspired by Bruce Lee's iconic yellow and black tracksuit in the movie *Game Of Death*. Originally, Alex's suit was complemented by a pair of blue boots and a blue medallion, but in later games this is switched for a new red tracksuit with yellow detail instead - the same costume he's kept for his recent appearances in *Sega Superstars Tennis* and *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*.

HEAD

When you consider Alex Kidd's turbulent relationship with his parent (Sega), it's ironic that in the games Alex is an orphan. In *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*, he learns he is a lost prince, and so sets off to protect the planet Aries (*Miracle World*) and rescue his brother Prince Egle from the evil usurper Janken The Great. It's likely that Alex's young, boyish look was selected to make him appear cooler than Mario, and easier for younger gamers to relate to.

FACE

Some people mistakenly refer to Alex Kidd as Alex the Kid; believing that the 'kid' part is to be taken literally to emphasise the fact Alex is a boy. We reckon subsequent Sega heroes like Sonic the Hedgehog and Ecco the Dolphin are to blame for such name befuddlement.

FIST

Alex is proficient in the ancient art of the Shellcore; a discipline which gives him the ability to increase the size and power of his fists. Given the big ears that protrude from his head, those with mucky minds may imagine that Alex can increase the size of other body parts too - a trait that Sega mercifully saved for Pole of Pole's Big Adventure.

■ Alex Kidd received a very minor cameo in the SMS game *Kenseiden*.

■ Alex faces off against the first Janken boss in the game *Alex Kidd In Miracle World*.

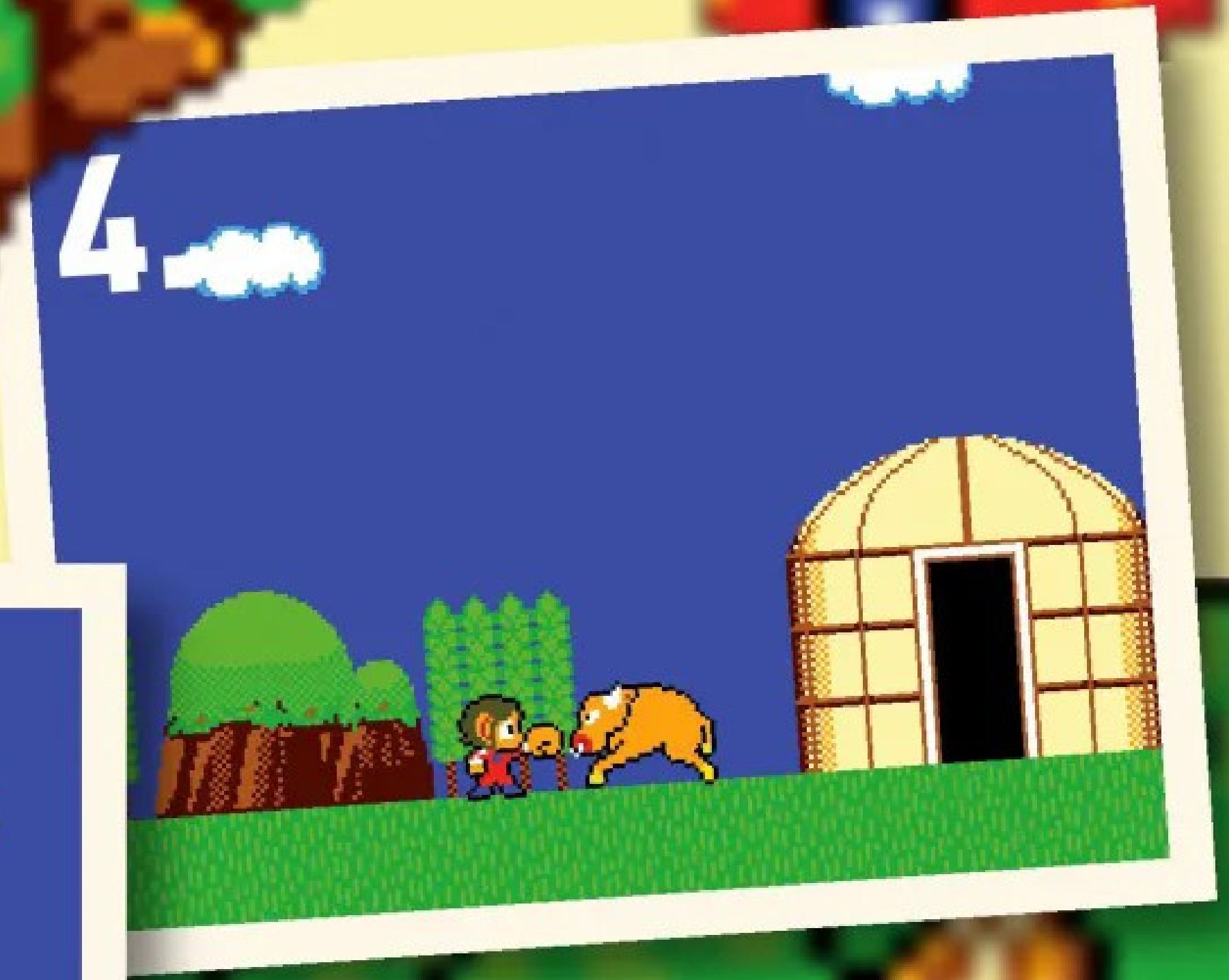
ALEX KIDD
in
SHINOBI WORLD
PRESS START BUTTON
©SEGA 1990

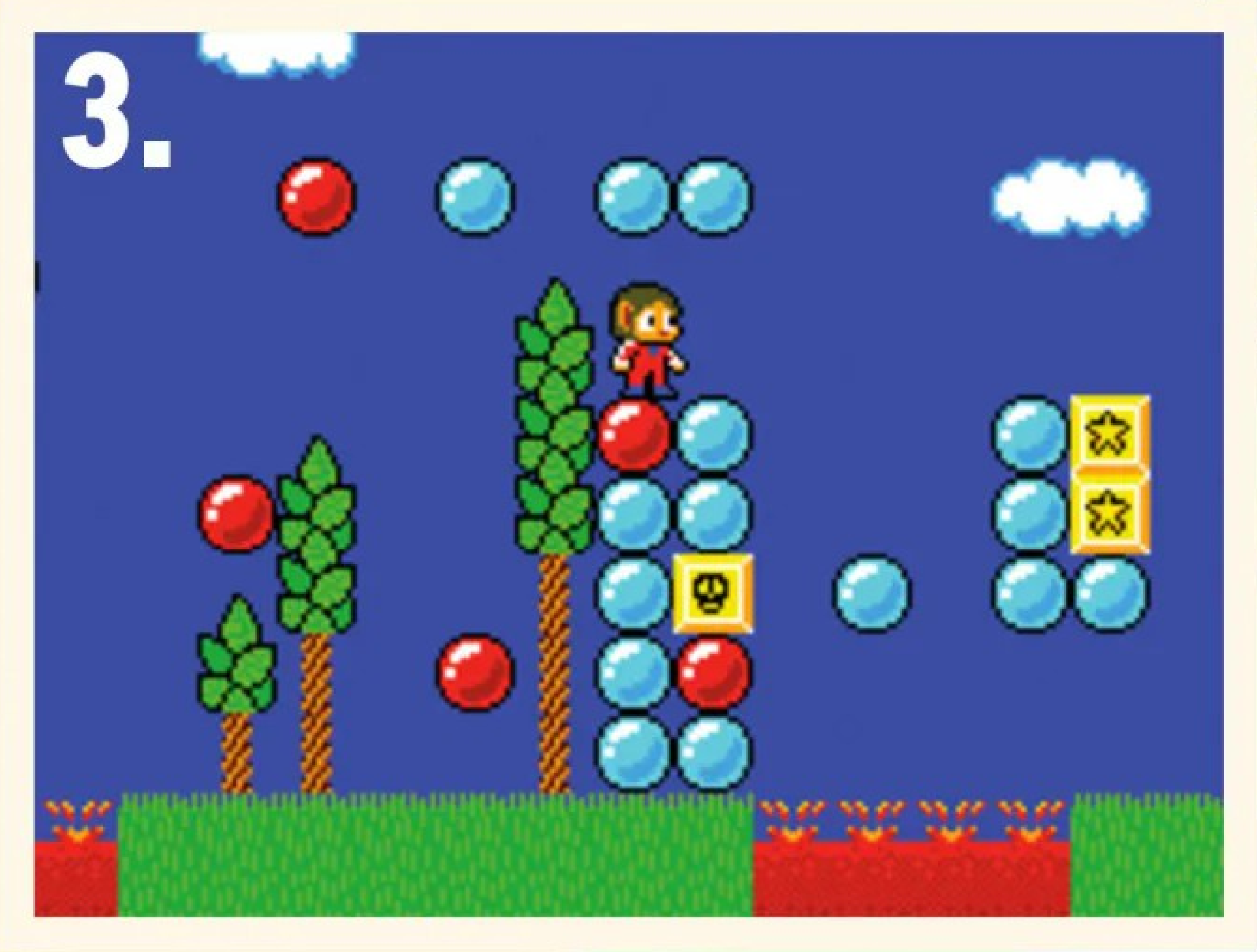
■ *Alex Kidd In Shinobi World*, a game that many fans consider to be Alex's best.

■ Alex returned to our screens (with all the other Sega rejects) in *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*.

A TOURIST'S GUIDE TO MIRACLE WORLD

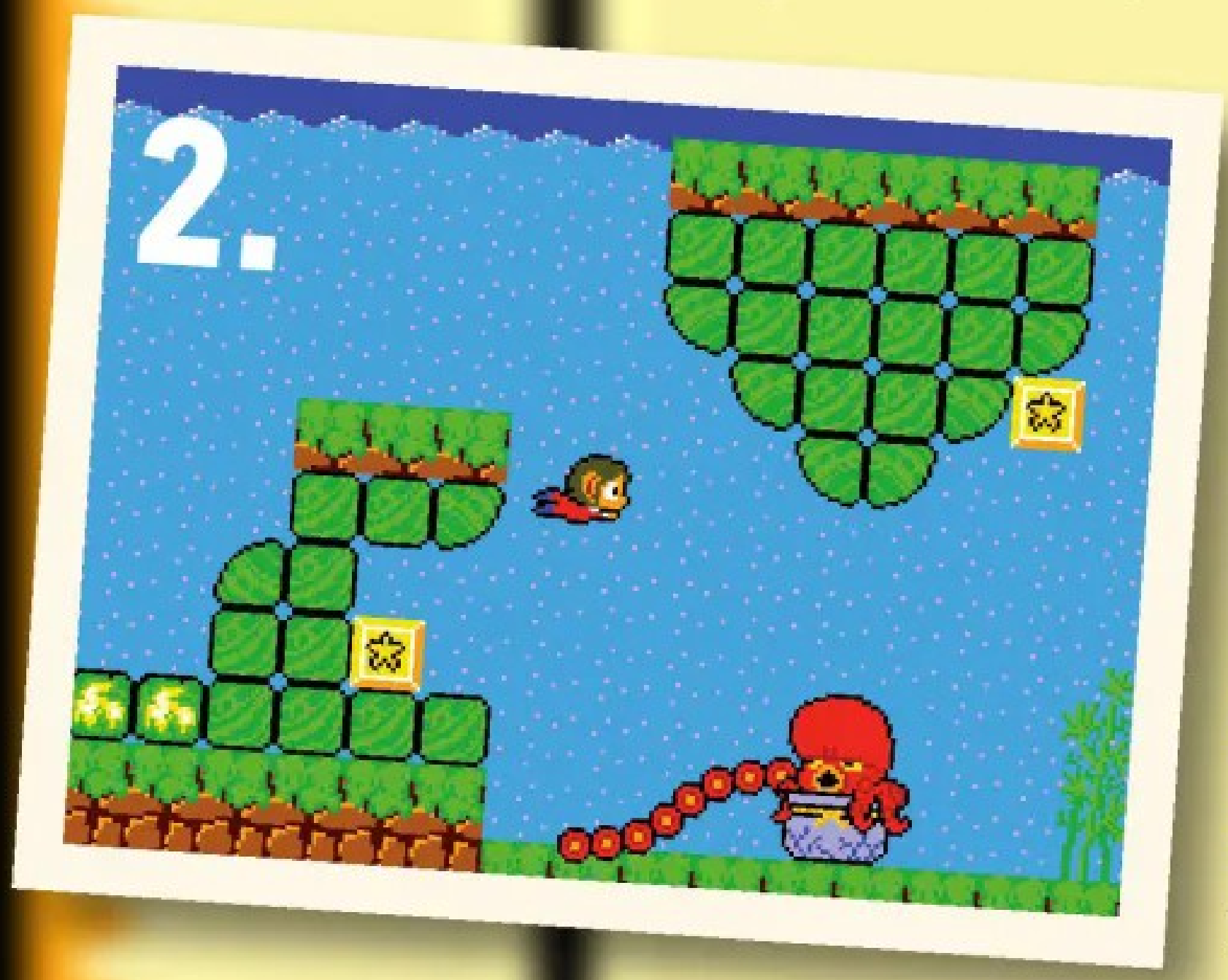
Welcome to Miracle World. A favourite holiday resort for the videogame rich and famous, it's the best place to sit back, relax and unwind. Take a plunge in our warm lakes, see some OF our wildlife, and don't even think about leaving without sampling our famous rice cakes – a Miracle World delicacy. Don't panic if you're new to the resort; we've listed the ten must-see places to visit to ensure that your trip is an unforgettable one…





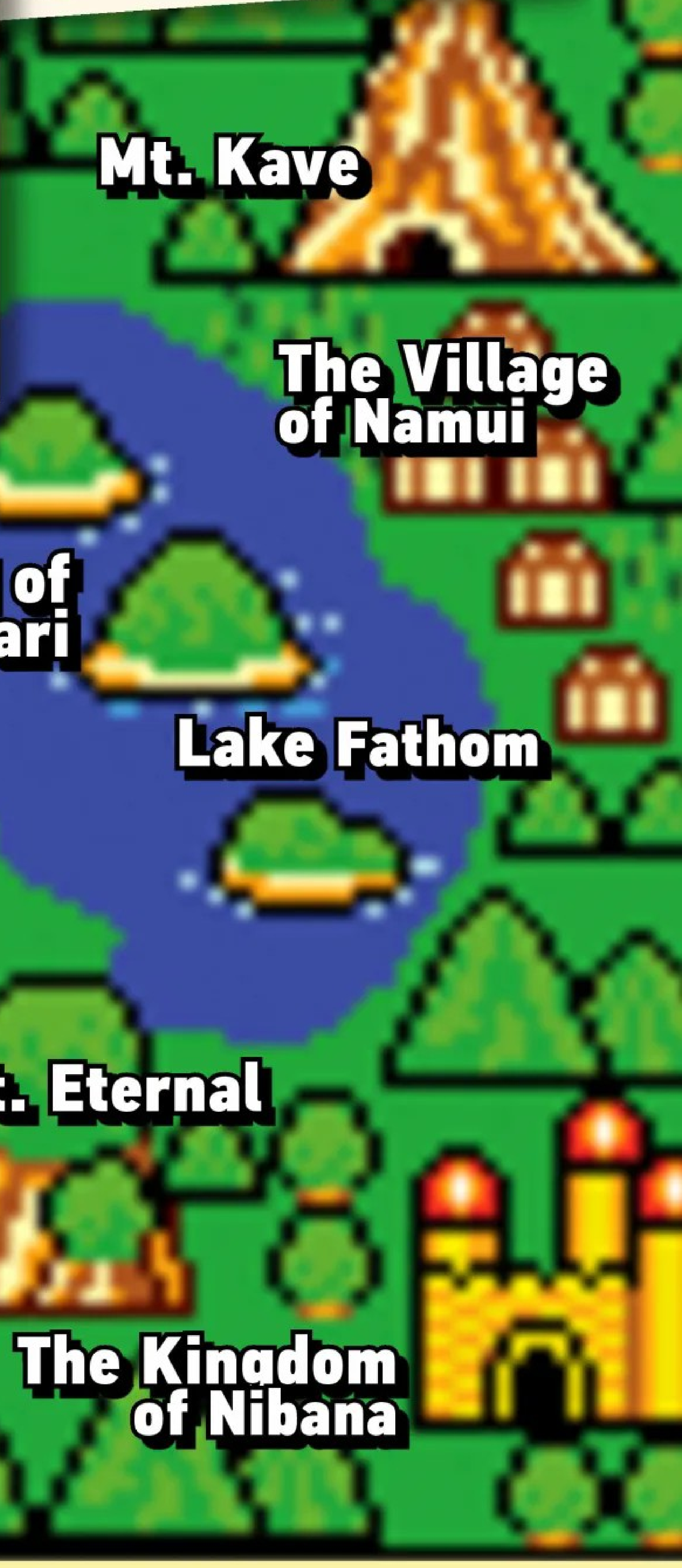
1. Mt. Eternal

Why not begin your stay with an early morning hike up Mt. Eternal, which offers unparalleled sights of the whole of Miracle World – unless you fancy balancing on the mouth of the volcanic Mt. Kave of course, which we don't recommend. On your ascent you'll see falcons (don't panic; they're harmless if not disturbed) and, if you're really unlucky, the ghost of a dead mountaineer said to haunt the peak and ward off fellow climbers with his hiking pole. Also, if you want to purchase a souvenir of your day, be sure to also visit the Mt. Eternal Gift Shop, which also offers a handy bike-hire service for those wishing to save their legs for the trip back to the hotel.



2. Lake Fathom

Lake Fathom is by far the very best place to do a spot of snorkelling in Miracle World. The lake has a huge range of underwater wildlife waiting to be discovered, including tropical fish, seahorses and our indigenous, pot-guarding octopus. WARNING: the octopus is deadly so must be observed from a safe distance at all times.

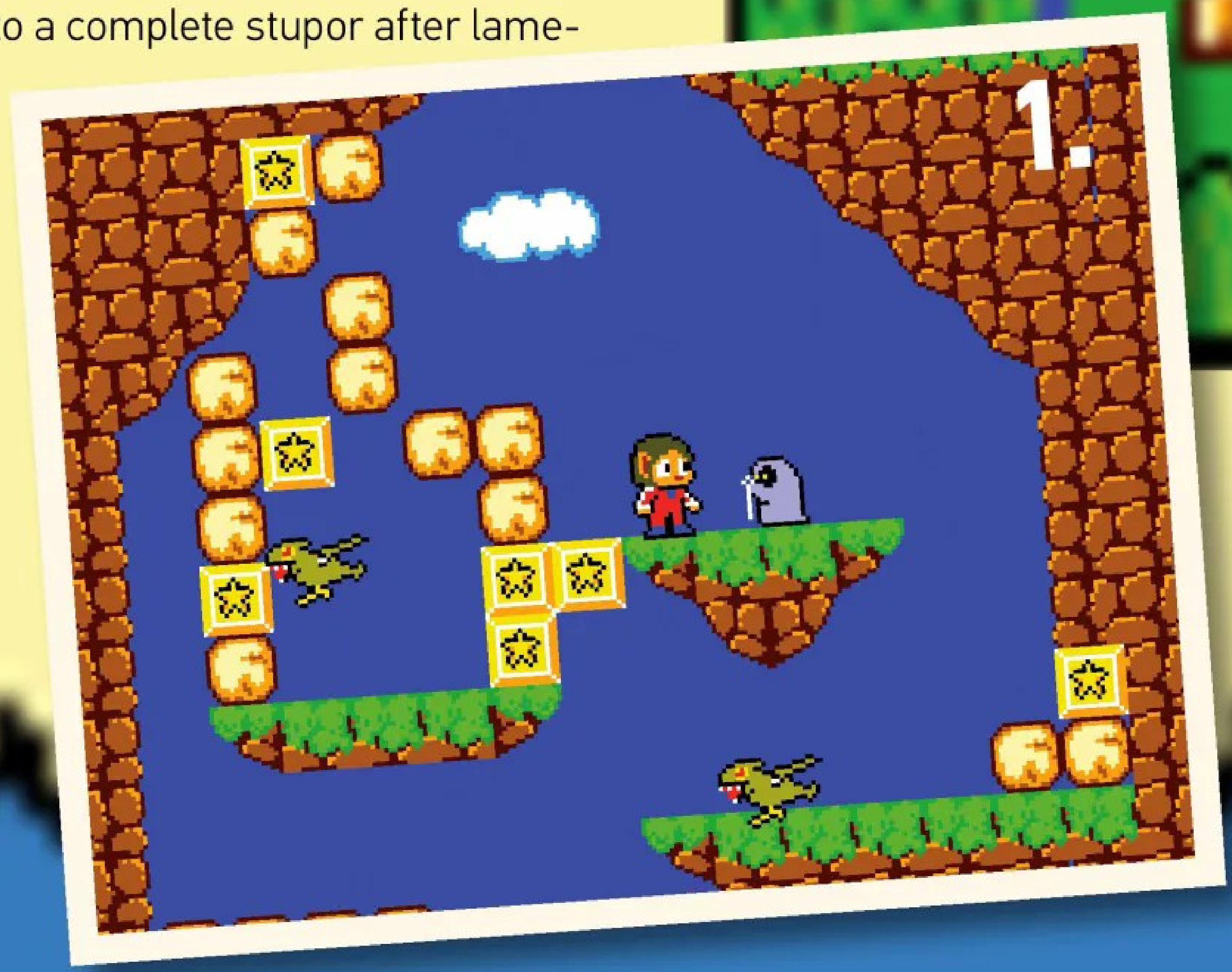


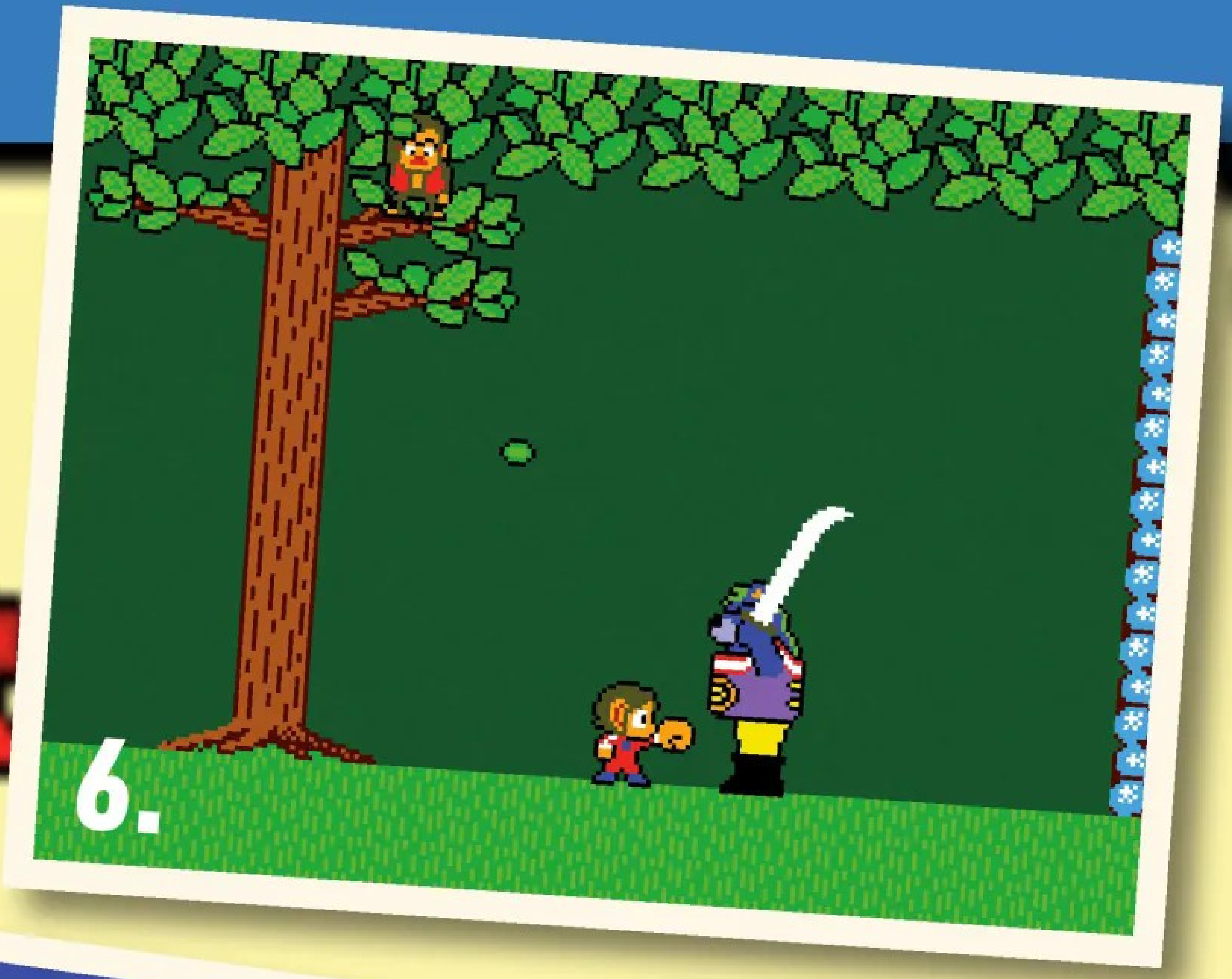
3. The Island of St. Nurari

We understand that you may like some time to yourself during your stay, a few me-hours away from the kids so you can down mojitos in the bar while your wife flirts with the cabana boy. No worries – we have everything covered. Why not cart the kids off to The Island of St. Nurari for an afternoon? It is home to one of the largest ball parks in the universe, after all! Then, once you've drunk yourself into a complete stupor after lame-mouthing your wife to everyone in the bar, make everything solid again by renewing your vows in St. Nurari's Chapel O' Love.

4. The Village of Namui

For a special night out, why not watch the bare-knuckle bullfighting in Namui village? Be sure to book early to avoid disappointment.

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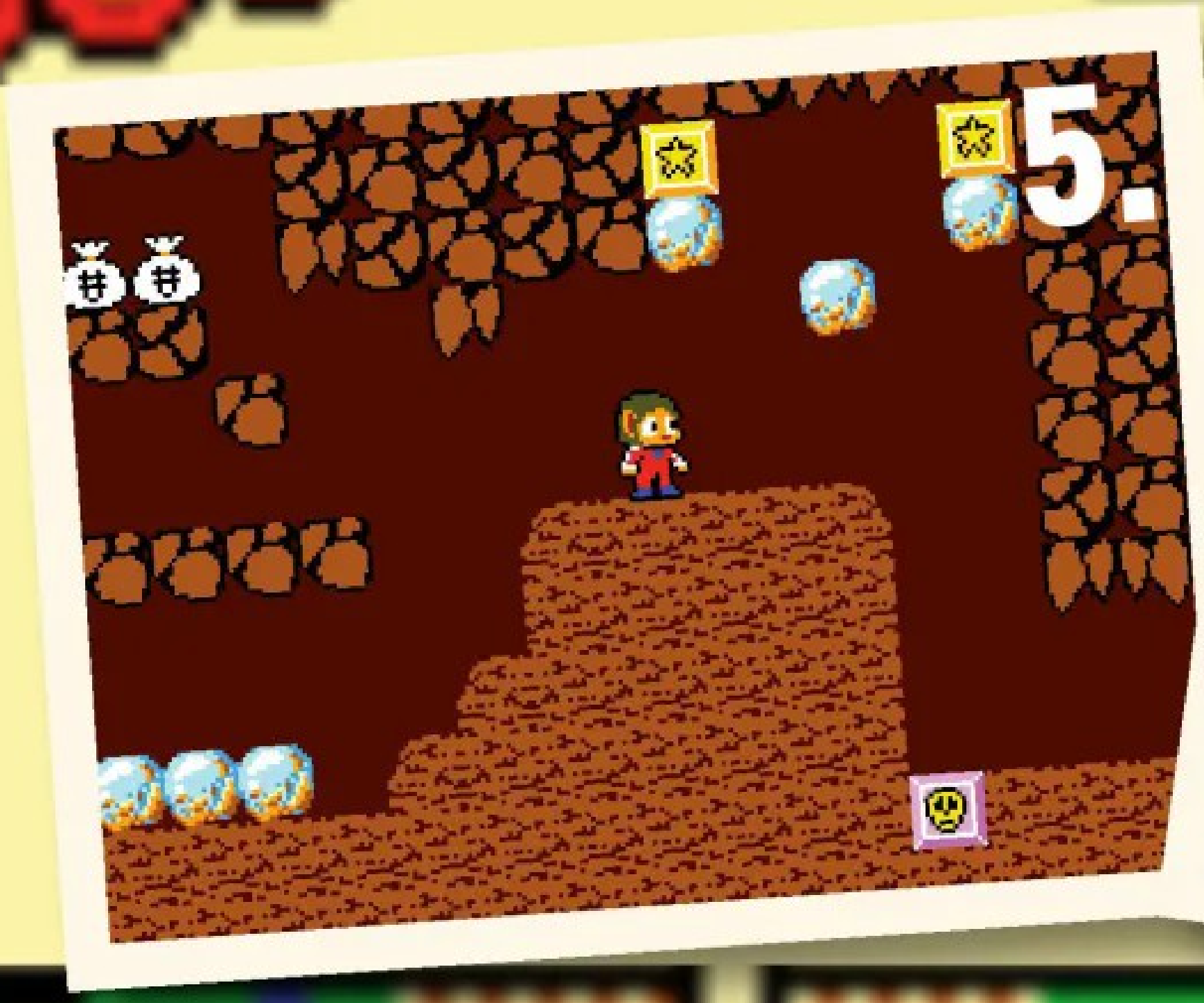
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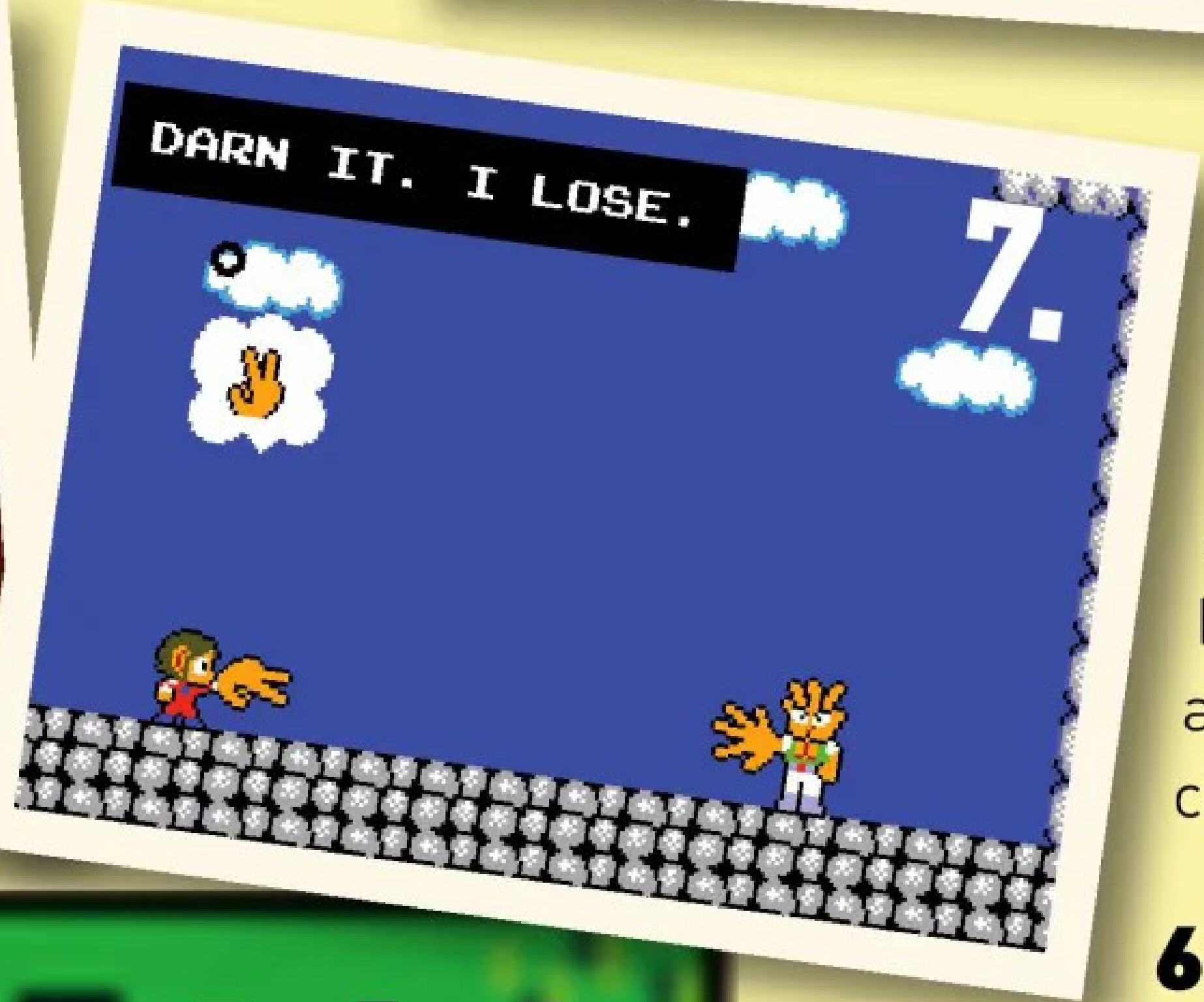
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DARN IT. I LOSE.

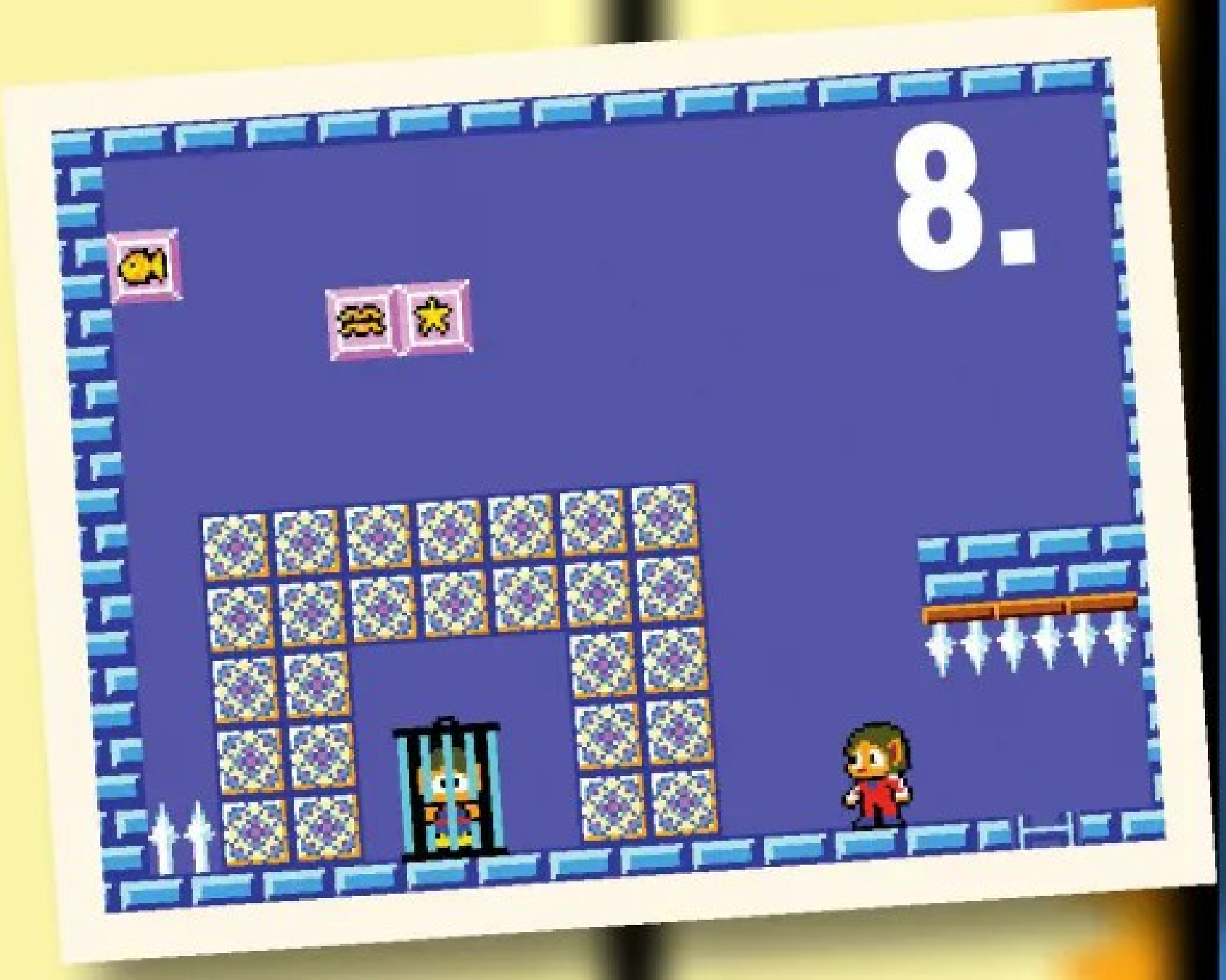
Radaxian Castle
The Blakwoods
Bingo Lowland
The City of Radaxian

5. Mt. Kave

If you fancy yourself as a bit of an adrenaline junkie then you could spend a day spelunking inside the dark and dangerous guts of Mt Kave, a dormant volcano home to hundreds of bats and puddles of molten lava. N.B.: This activity may not be covered by your holiday insurance, so check with your insurance company before booking.

6. The Blakwoods

Owned by Prince Egle, The Blakwoods is Miracle World's conservation park, and home to the world's first motorbike safari. So hop on a motorbike, or ride pillion with one of our tour guides. You might spot The Blakwood's lime-throwing monkeys or the famous sabre-wielding blue bear of Miracle World.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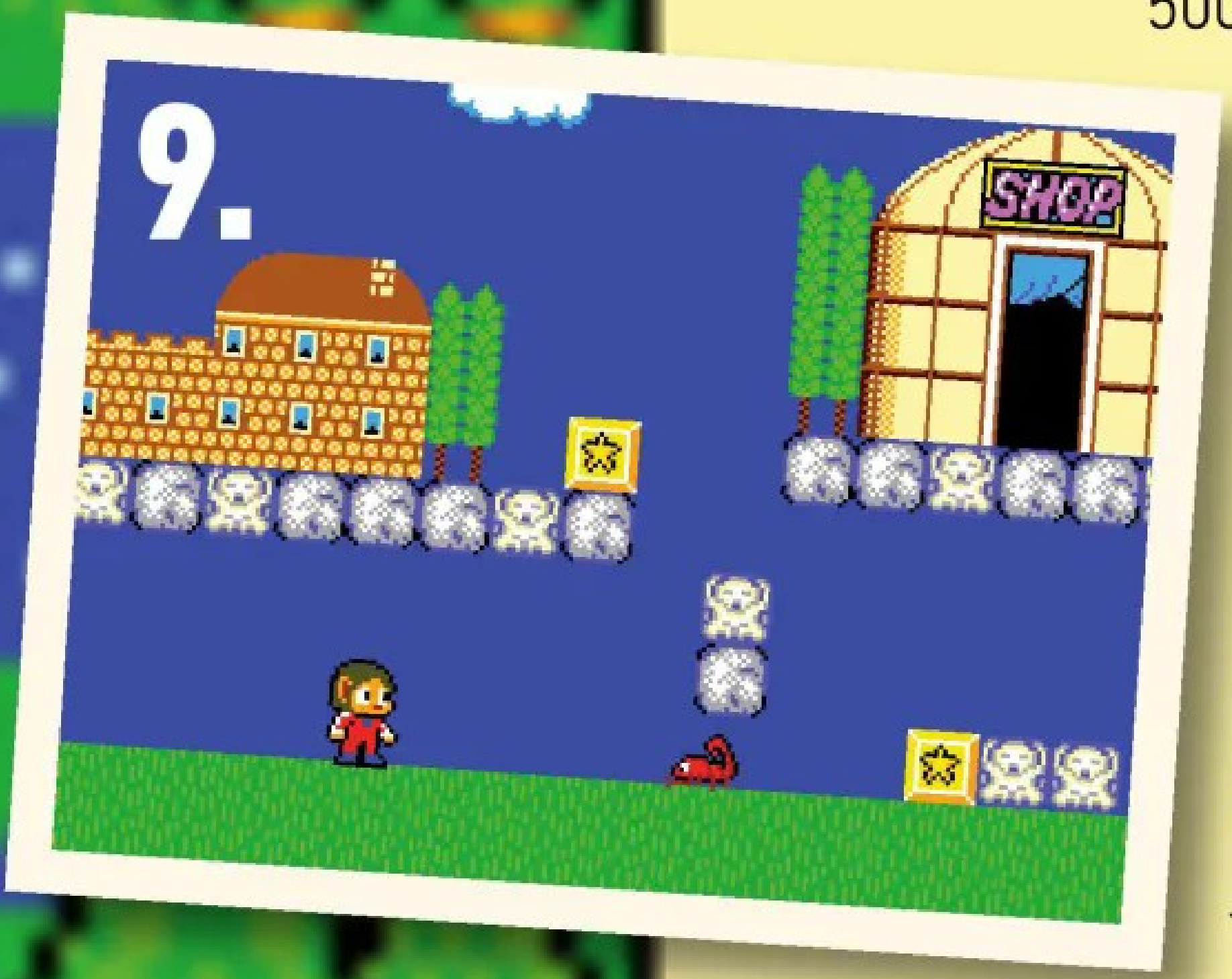
7. Bingo Lowland

Despite its name, Bingo Lowland isn't where Miracle World's elderly populace comes to play Bingo, but is in fact home of The Extremities - our World Champion Rock, Paper, Scissors team. Here they can be seen limbering up for an upcoming match against previous champs Team God Hand, who, during last month's transfer window, signed Thing from *The Addams Family* for an eleventeen-figure sum.

8. Radaxian Castle

Once the former home of Prince Egle, The Radaxian Castle is now Miracle World's only correctional facility, and opens up its cells to the public. Since the crime rate is so low in Miracle World some feel that this 500,000-capacity penal complex is a little unnecessary. There is currently just one person incarcerated in this goliath waste of Miracle World's tax money.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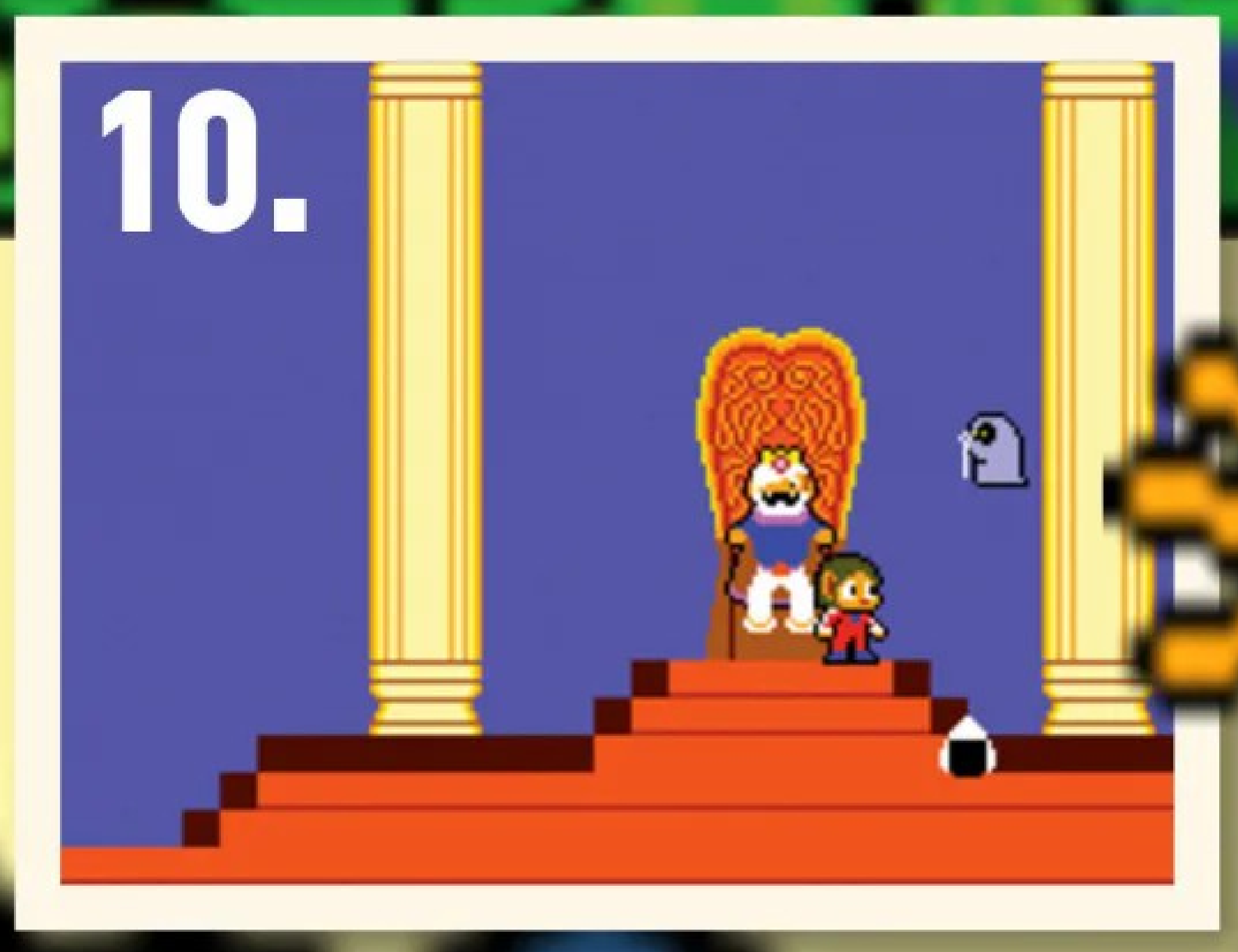
9. The City of Radaxian

The city of Radaxian is capital of Miracle World, and is the very best place to eat, shop, drink and even catch a show. By far the most popular is the magic show by the 'amazing' Peace Sign Man, who can make his own head come away from his neck and fly around the stage like a Jellyfish trapped inside a washing machine.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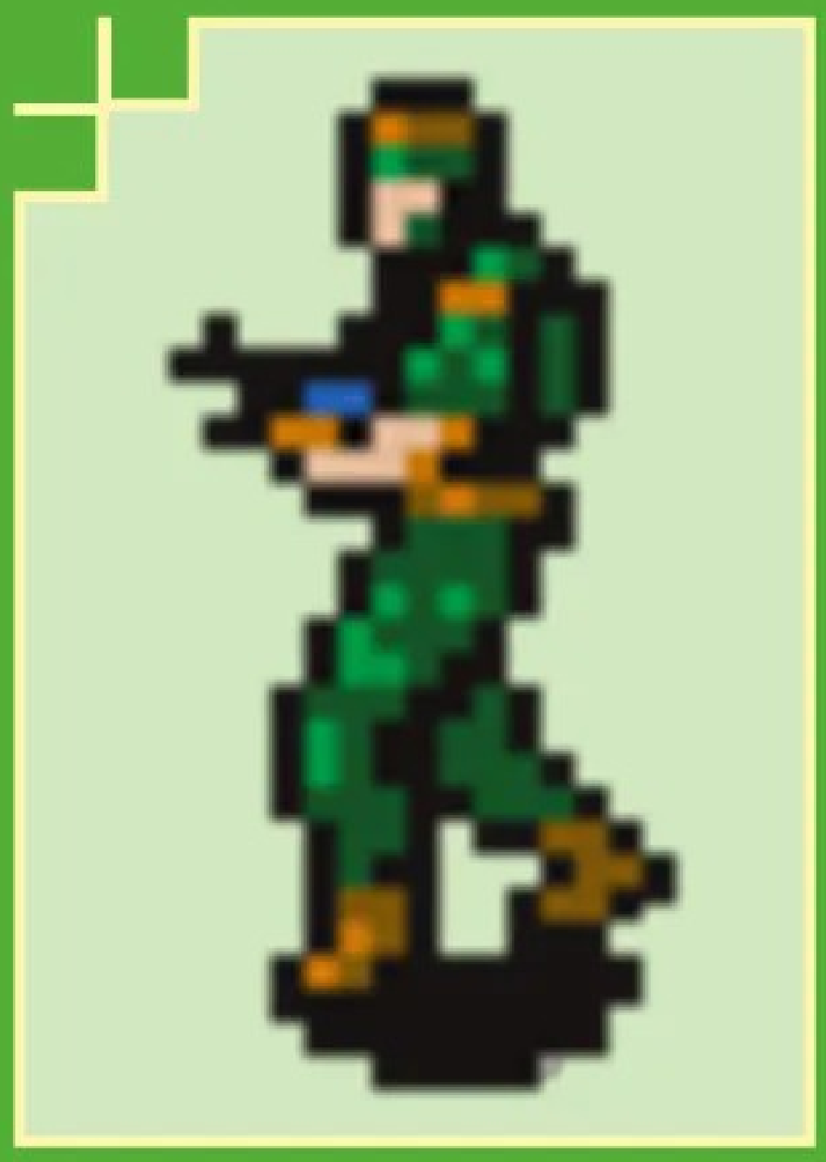
10. The Kingdom of Nibana

Finally, those wanting to soak up some of Miracle World's rich history should take a gyrocopter to the Kingdom Of Nibana. While the king is sadly no longer with us – he died suddenly from hypothermia while working undercover as an ice-cream man during the filming of *The Un-secret Millionaire* – a coin-operated animatronic of the ruler now sits on his throne, and for a single Baum (the currency of Miracle World) will vend you a rice cake filled with vanilla ice cream.

SOLID SNAKE

"Unfortunately, killing is one of those things that gets easier every time you do it." Solid Snake was a true Eighties icon



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** SOLID SNAKE
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** METAL GEAR
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** METAL GEAR SOLID
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** SNEAKING

Throughout the Eighties, the game industry was rife with the classic, pure mechanics of perfect gaming. If you could jump on a turtle, gobble up fruit, dodge a laser and throw a punch, then all was well. Then Hideo Kojima was asked to create a game for the non-mainstream MSX home computer. Kojima has often stated how problematic this was. The MSX hardware was far from perfect, its capabilities severely below that of the home consoles of the time. This essentially meant that, for Kojima to create a groundbreaking game, he would need inspiration; a new angle of gameplay that would limit the number of sprites on screen and suit a non-scrolling mechanic so the MSX could run it. A passionate film buff – he originally intended to become a film director – Kojima was influenced by movie design from day one. The answer to the MSX riddle was found in the film *The Great Escape* as Kojima settled on the concept of escape. This, in turn, produced a problem: heroes don't run away. A fleeing lead character is far from popular. Therefore, the concept was turned on its head and the world witnessed the birth of its most popular stealth game.

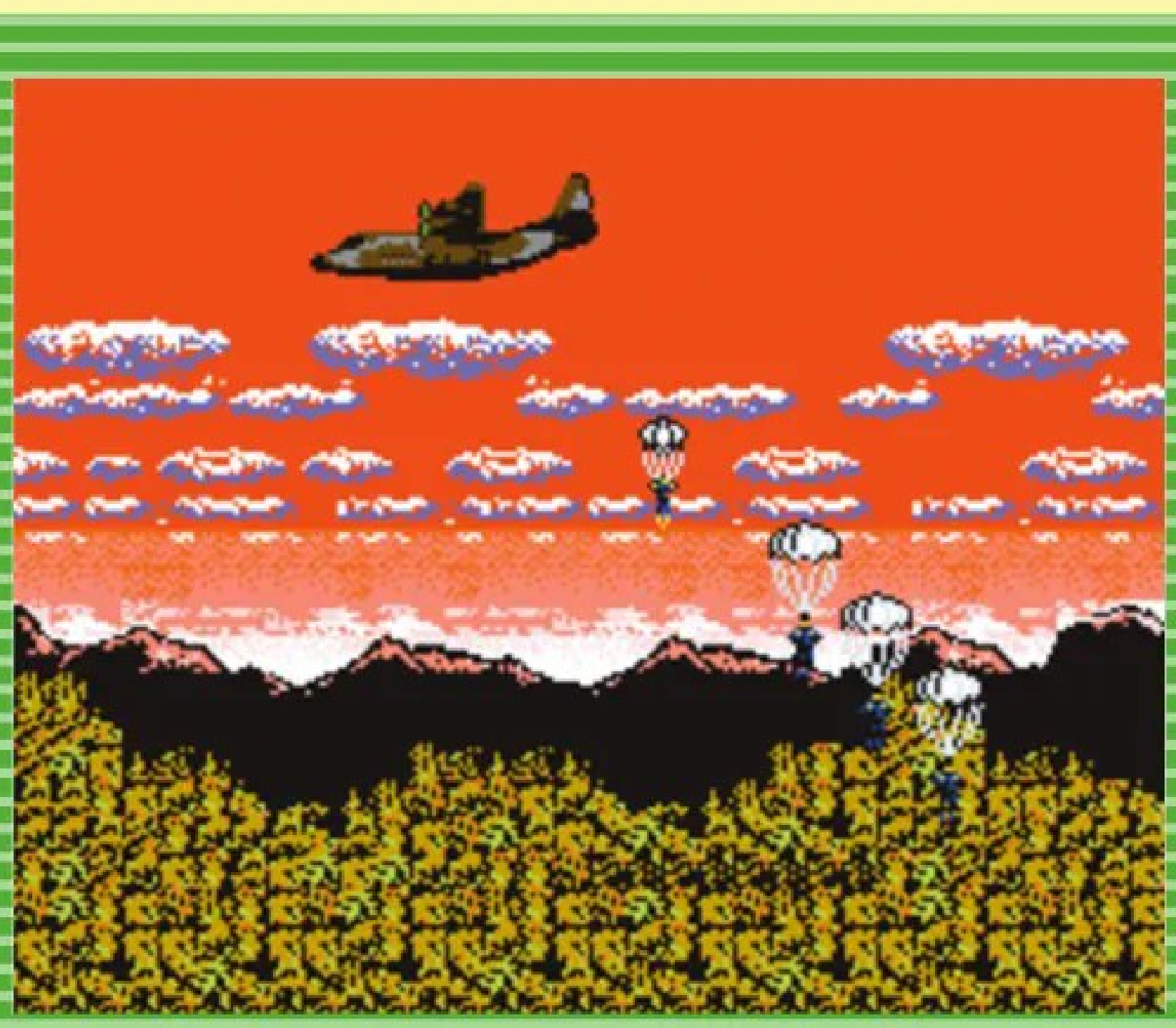
The revolutionary *Metal Gear* gameplay was just one of Kojima's two main innovations. The second was storyline. *Metal Gear* had a maturity of storytelling far superior to the majority of its rivals at the time. In retrospect, the idea of a rookie agent of a black ops and espionage unit, briefed with the mission of disarming and destroying the bipedal, nuclear weapon Metal Gear, who comes to realise the founder of his unit is also the corrupt leader of the villainous army, seems highly clichéd. Compare it to stories of a plumber jumping on turtles, or a yellow face that eats blobs while avoiding slightly larger blobs, and suddenly it seems like a masterpiece. The influence is obvious. The Eighties was the golden age of action movies, with innumerable villains threatening humanity with nuclear warheads or killer robots. Even the cover art of *Metal Gear* is identical to a scene with Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn) from *Terminator. Metal Gear* may not be an epic, but it helped establish a sincerity of in-game plots, which paved the way for today's more fully realised stories.

It wasn't just Solid Snake's image that was a direct reflection of Hollywood cinema at the time, his personality was also comparable to the movies. His determination to get the job done at all costs while unflinchingly sticking to his moral compass and beliefs was the epitome of the Eighties hero. Kojima capitalised on Snake's heroism at the start of *Metal Gear* with a key evocative tool: abandonment. On entry into Outer Heaven, Snake is dropped by a plane, along with three others who suddenly disappear, leaving Snake with nothing. He has no guns and not even a knife. This opening scene is the most important of all in the early series for two reasons: it places the emphasis entirely on Solid Snake himself as he has no tools and no help. It puts the player directly into Snake's shoes because he has no back story and there is nothing between the player and the character.

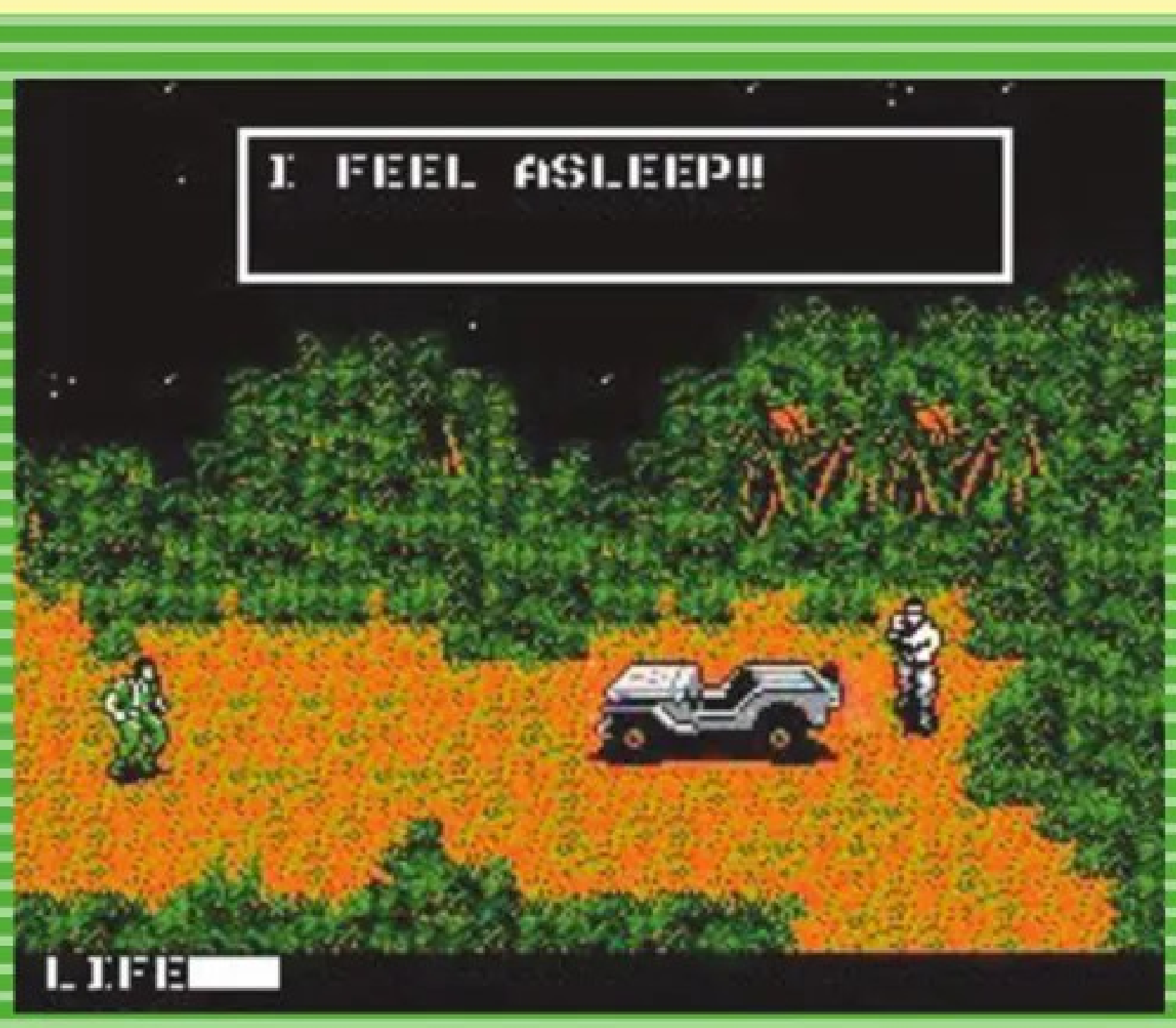
Finally, the original series was capped off with the sublime *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, successfully completing the series' riches-to-rags-to-riches turnaround. It was here that Kojima displayed his creative direction (for the original series) with the most clarity. *Metal Gear 2* amplified the filmic feel of the original with a greatly increased stable of characters and plot points.

Hideo Kojima has previously stated that a videogame's lead character is the most important element of its story, citing audience association as the key to involving the player. Kojima has continually qualified this opinion. Solid Snake's lonesome mission, in which he starts with nothing and must equip himself with weapons and information along the way to overcome a fearsome enemy territory, is distinctly of the 'lone hero fighting for humanity' archetype. Both story and character are instantly associable. In 1987, the gaming world stepped directly into Snake's shoes with nothing more than a pack of cigarettes and a pair of bare fists. The world of *Metal Gear* has grown exponentially over the past 32 years – not just with games, but also with comic books, action figures, novels, and there's even a radio drama in Japan – but the direct link between Solid Snake and his fans has been maintained. Kojima emphatically achieved Snake's audience association with the original *Metal Gear.* While he has a cameo in the latest Metal Gear, his last big onscreen release was *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots*. Here's hoping he gets a chance for one final mission. ✱

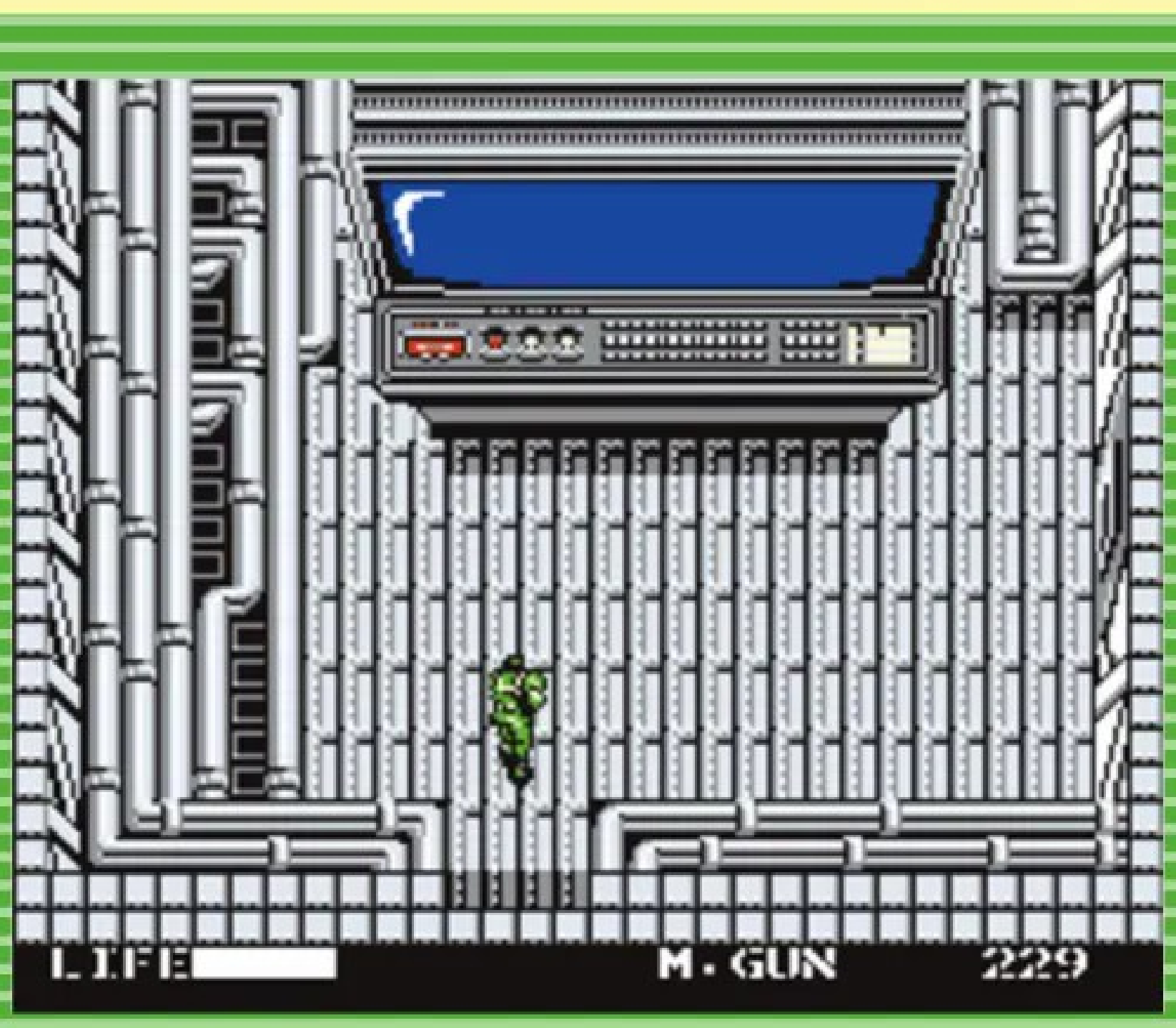
> MAGIC MOMENTS



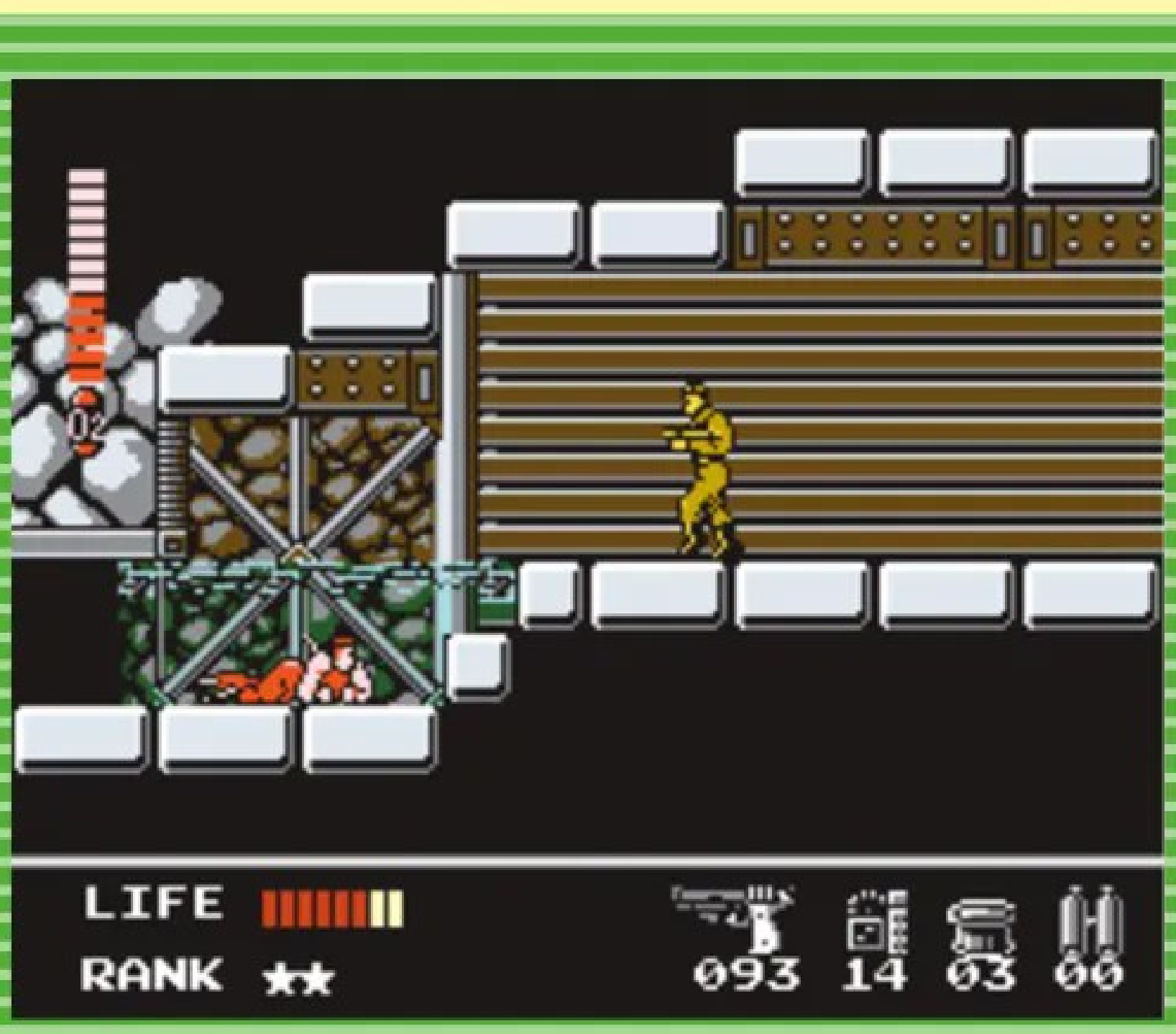
■ Snake is dropped into the battlefield for the very first time. It's a really iconic moment.



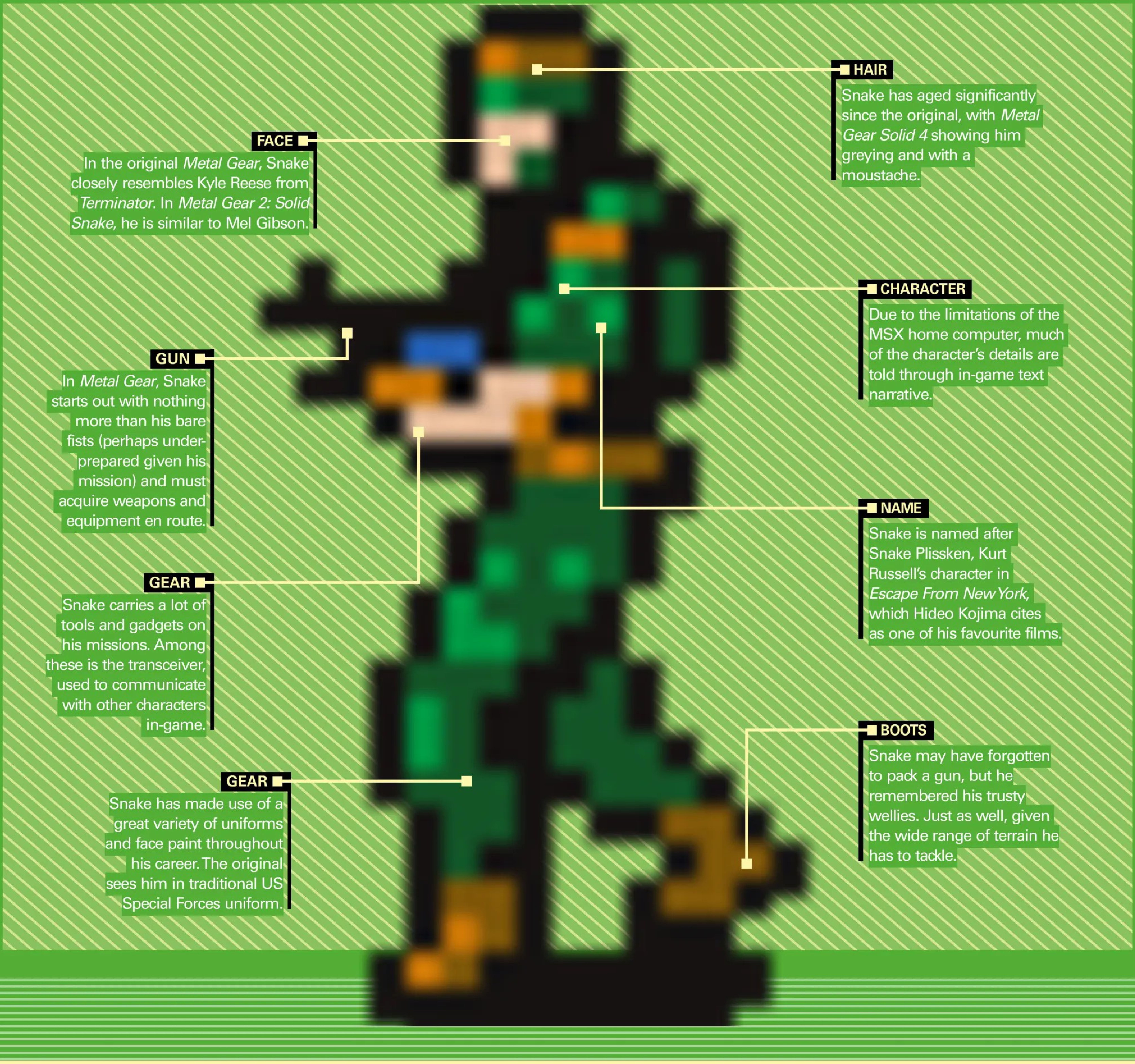
■ One of the earliest – and best – translation errors. This one only appears in the NES version.



■ Hideo Kojima finished *Metal Gear* by revealing the computer he wished it was designed for…



■ Snake goes side-scrolling in *Snake's Revenge*'s one addition to the *Metal Gear* formula.



FACE
In the original *Metal Gear*, Snake closely resembles Kyle Reese from *Terminator*. In *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, he is similar to Mel Gibson.

GUN
In *Metal Gear*, Snake starts out with nothing more than his bare fists (perhaps under-prepared given his mission) and must acquire weapons and equipment en route.

GEAR
Snake carries a lot of tools and gadgets on his missions. Among these is the transceiver, used to communicate with other characters in-game.

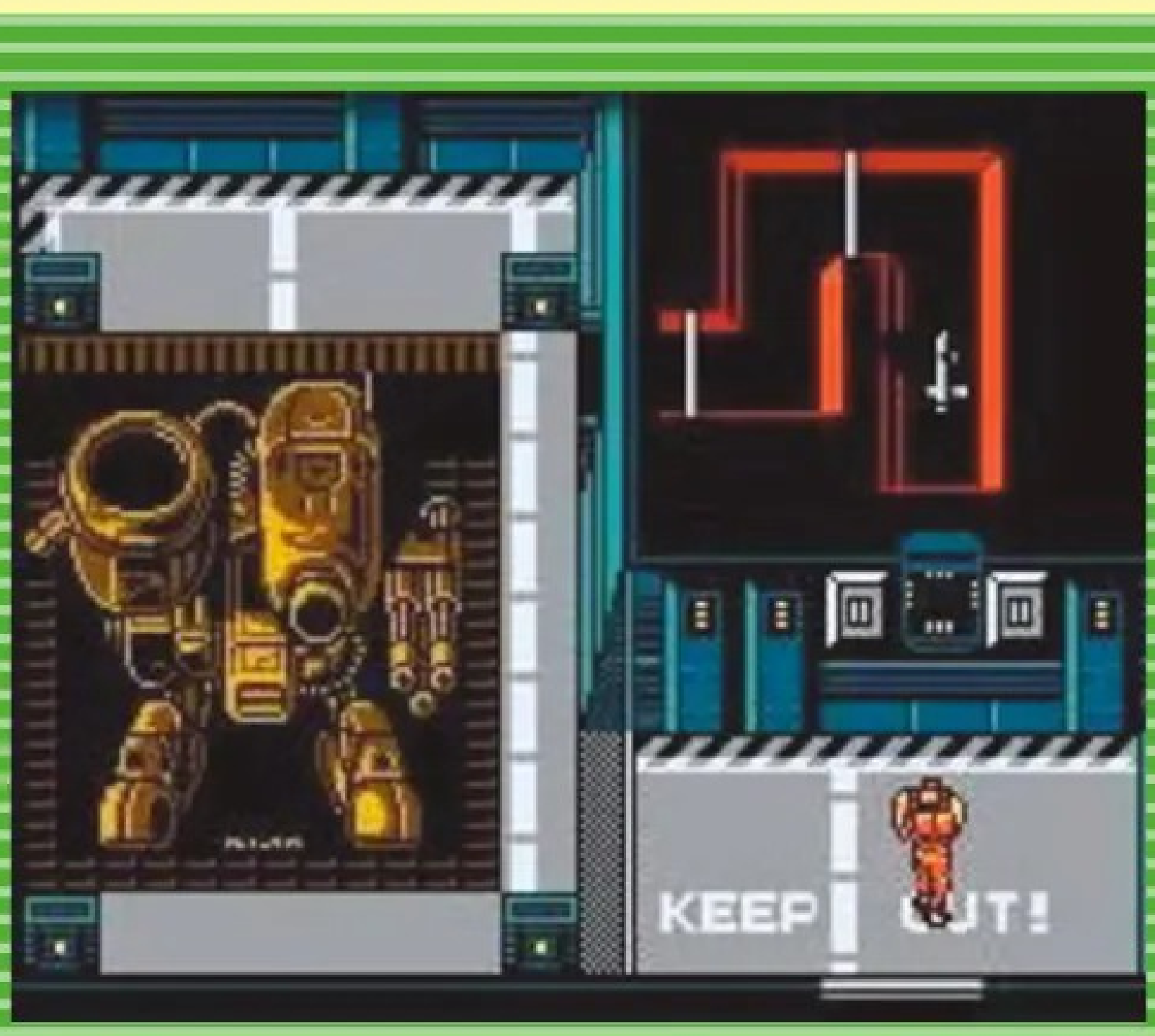
GEAR
Snake has made use of a great variety of uniforms and face paint throughout his career. The original sees him in traditional US Special Forces uniform.

HAIR
Snake has aged significantly since the original, with *Metal Gear Solid 4* showing him greying and with a moustache.

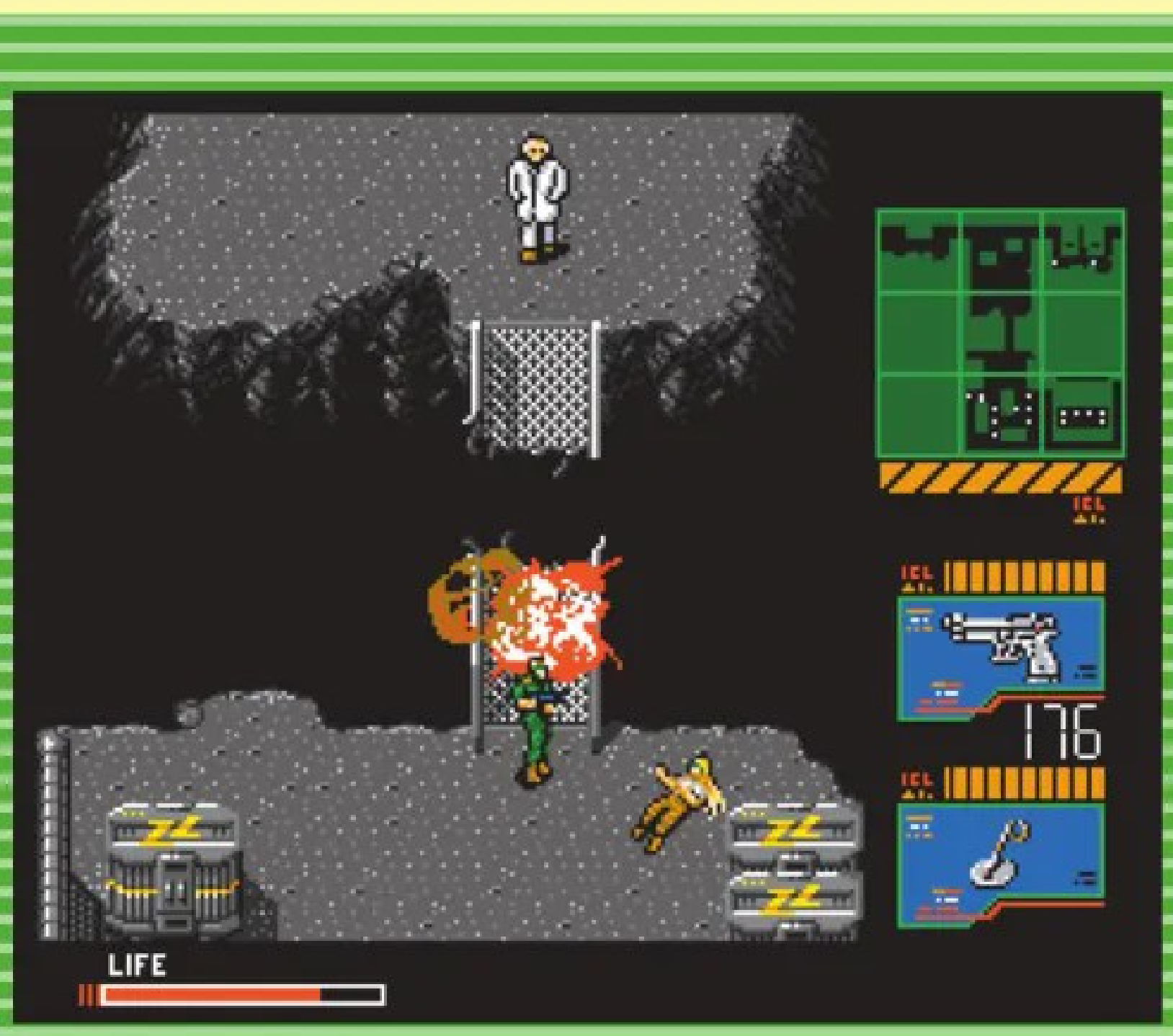
CHARACTER
Due to the limitations of the MSX home computer, much of the character's details are told through in-game text narrative.

NAME
Snake is named after Snake Plissken, Kurt Russell's character in *Escape From New York*, which Hideo Kojima cites as one of his favourite films.

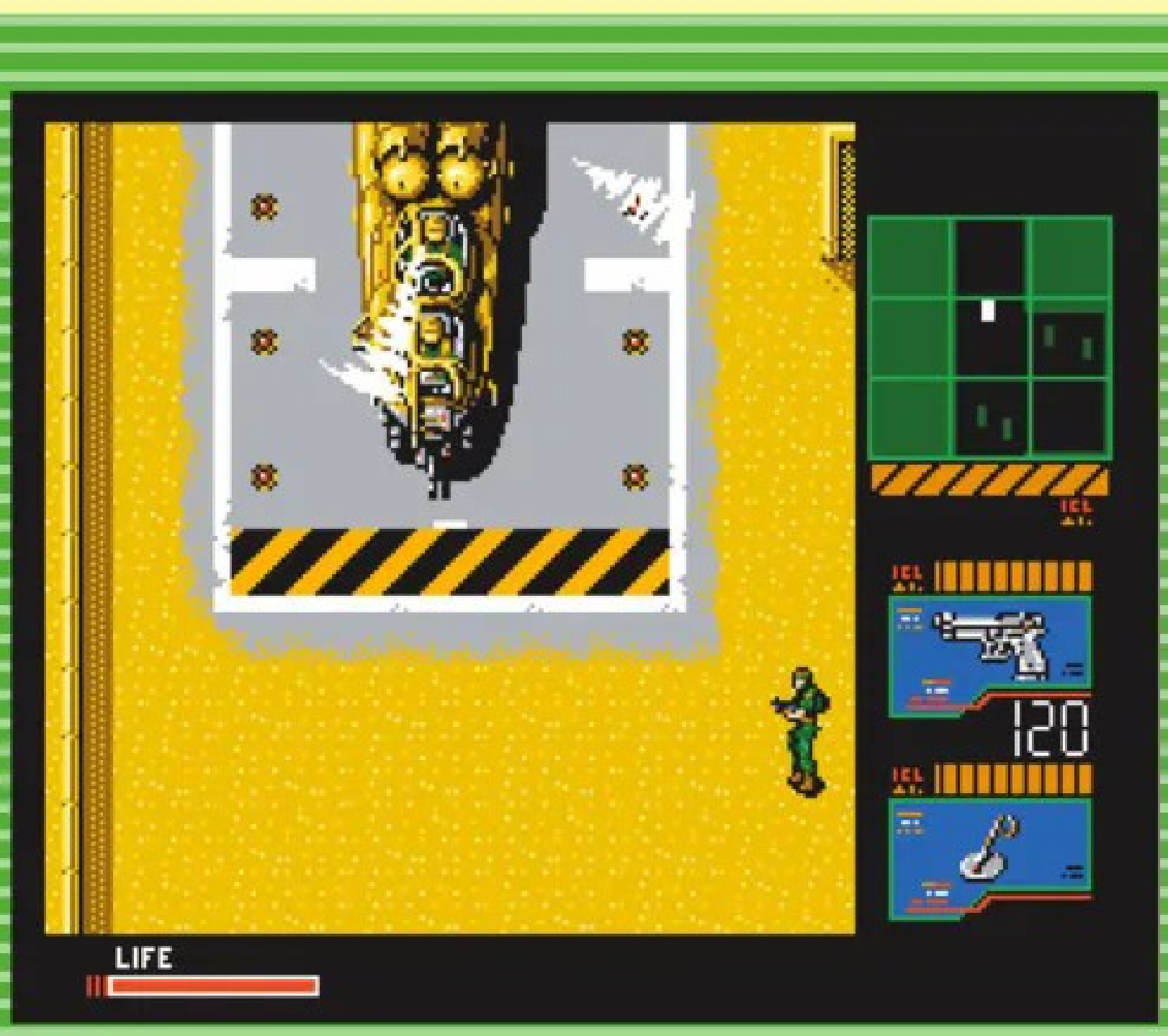
BOOTS
Snake may have forgotten to pack a gun, but he remembered his trusty wellies. Just as well, given the wide range of terrain he has to tackle.



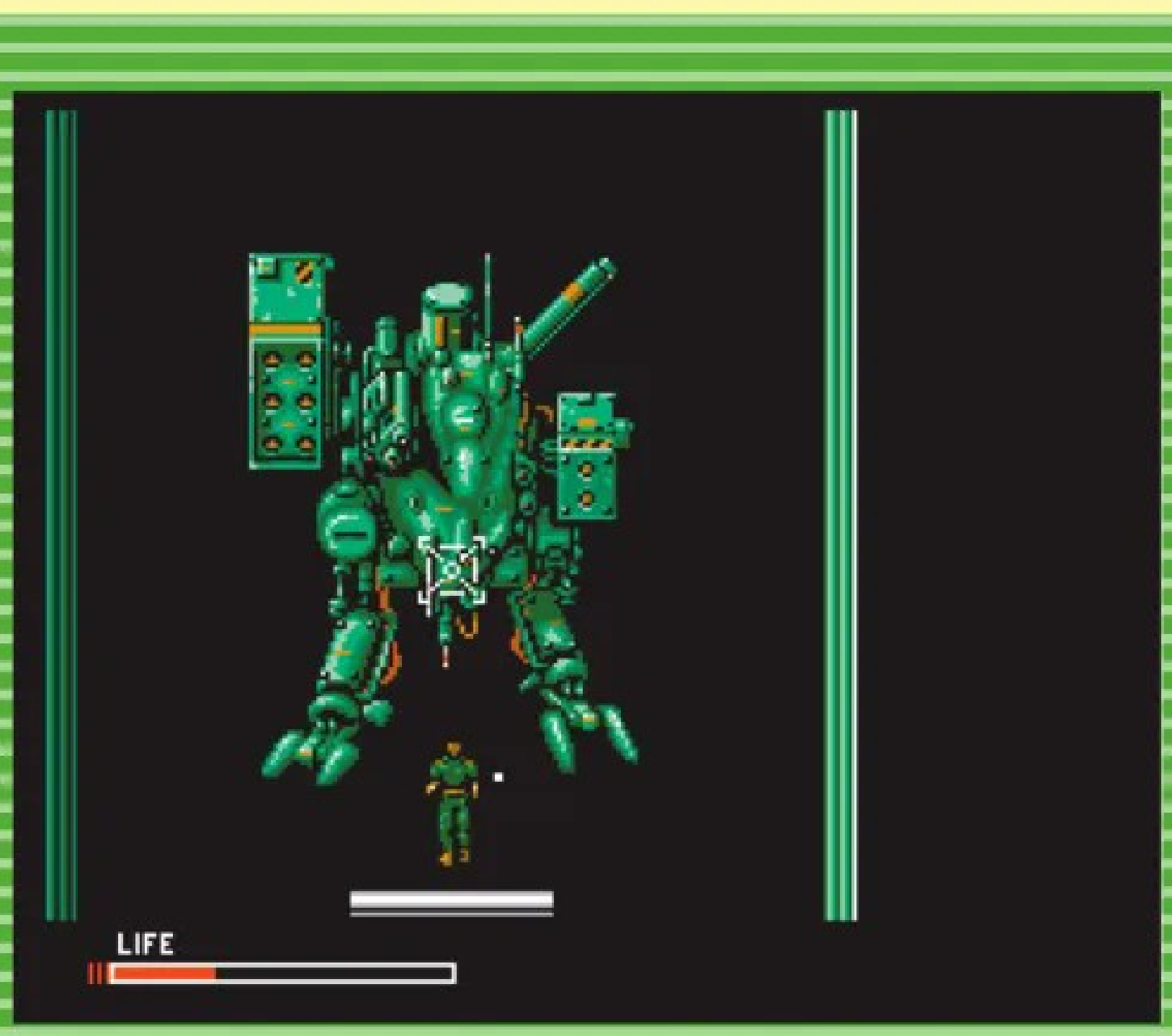
■ If you've made it this far into *Snake's Revenge* then feel free to bask in your own glory.



■ Natasha Marcova is killed in one of *Metal Gear: Solid Snake*'s many delightful plot points.



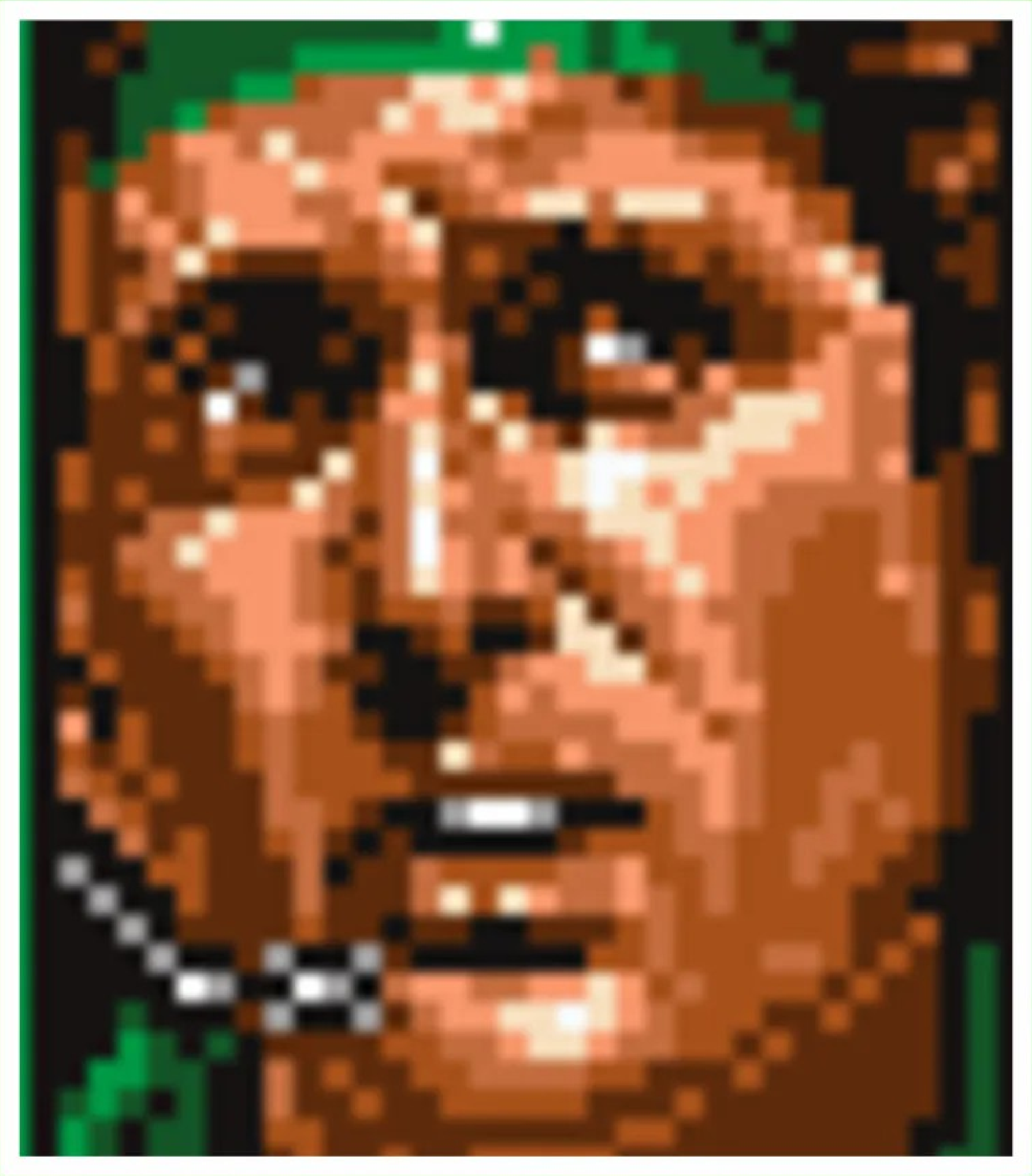
■ The series featured many appearances of the awesome Hind D helicopter boss. Shoot to kill!



■ Another nod to the influence of Hollywood. The title's boss resembles *Robocop 2*'s ED-209.

METAL GEAR THE RIP-OFFS

'Intellectual property' and 'copyright' didn't really exist in gaming's early days and Hideo Kojima's love of Hollywood is obvious in Metal Gear. Here are a few notable lookalikes…

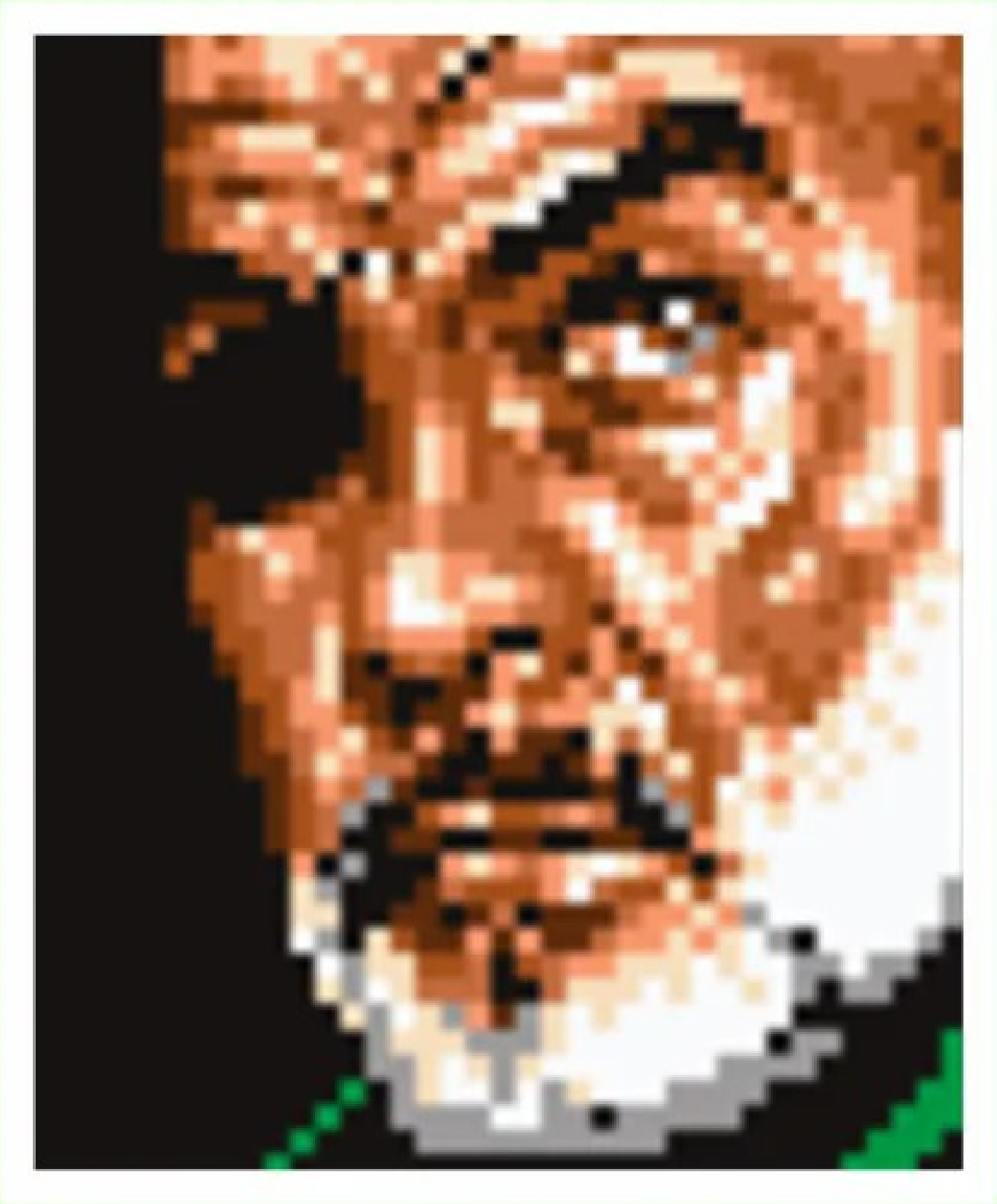


SOLID SNAKE

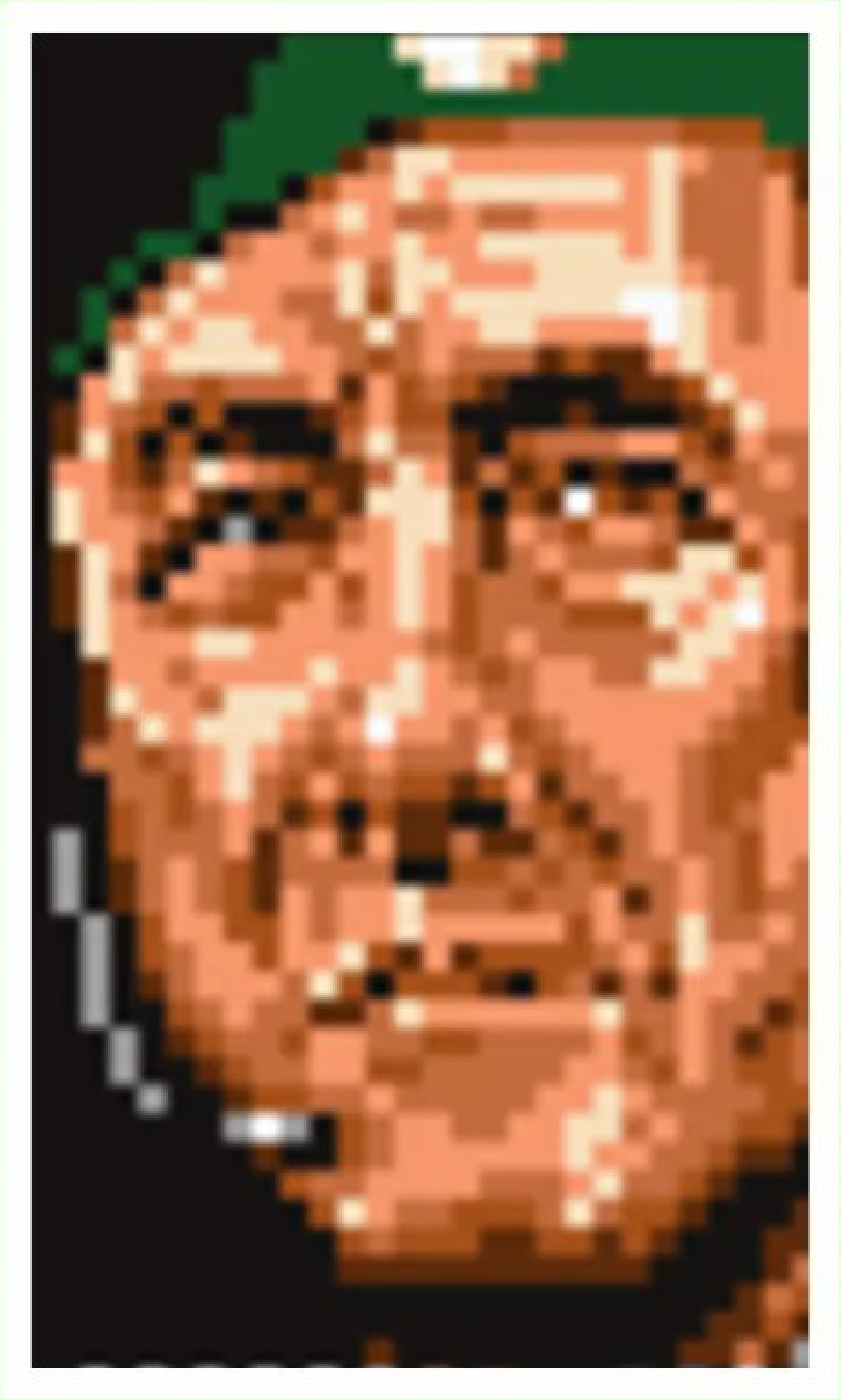
The man that needs no introduction, Solid Snake's imagery for the original *Metal Gear* was based on Michael Biehn's Kyle Reese in *Terminator*, to the extent that the cover art for *Metal Gear* shows him standing in the exact same position as Reese in a *Terminator* scene. Snake was described as a 'martial arts expert' in *Snake's Revenge*, where he appears very muscular, somewhat like any number of Arnold Schwarzenegger characters, but most notably Dutch in *Predator*. In *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, he looks remarkably like Mel Gibson.

BIG BOSS

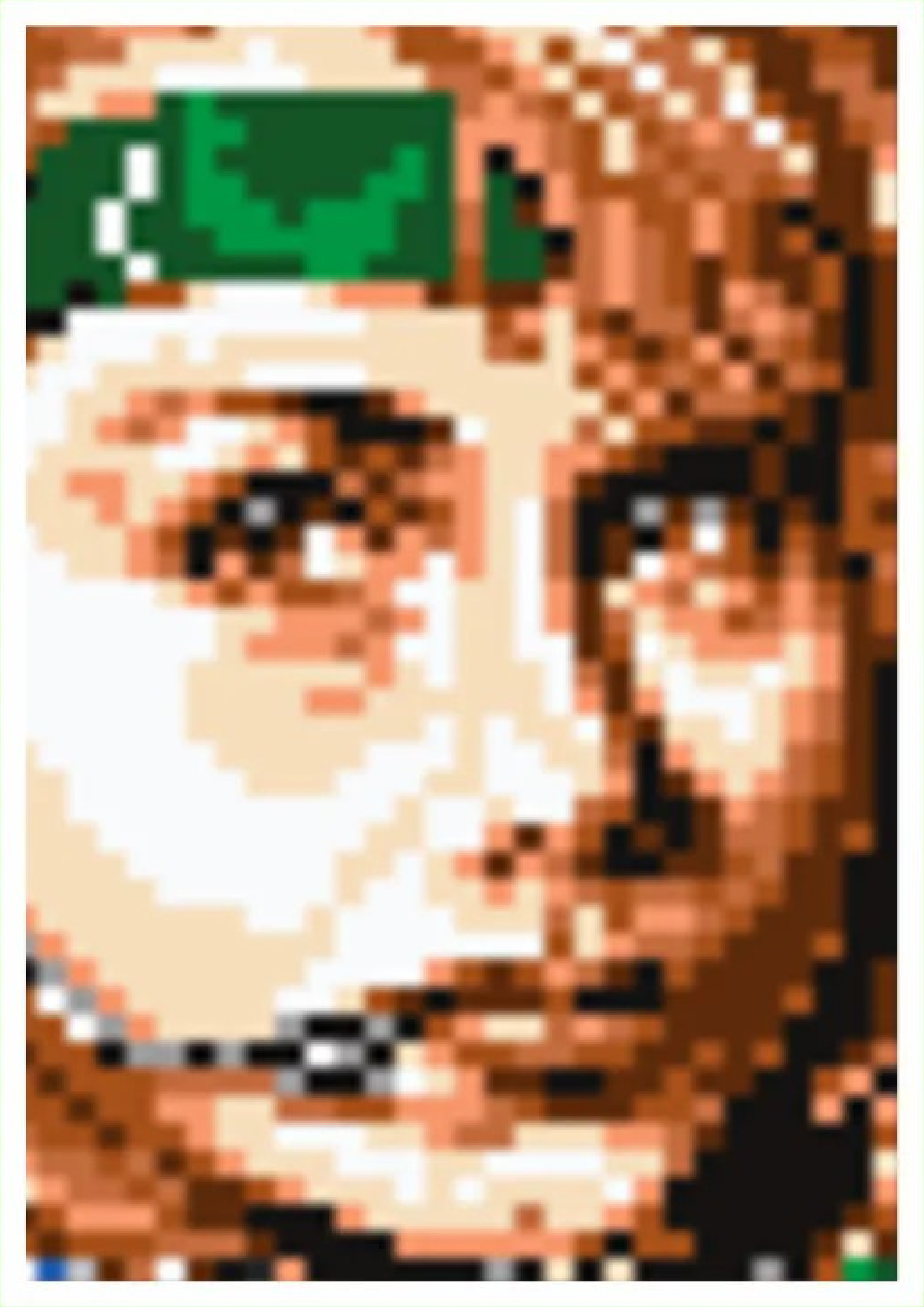
Considered by many to be the 20th Century's finest soldier, Big Boss is the 'father' of… well, most things: FOXHOUND, Outer Heaven, Zanzibar Land, even Snake, thanks to project Les Enfants Terribles (another movie reference for those counting). He shares both his underlying character, story and image with Sean Connery's Marko Ramius in *The Hunt For Red October*.



ROY CAMPBELL



Roy Campbell was the executive officer and Solid Snake's superior during Operation: Intrude F014. He is also one of Snake's best friends. Roy Campbell was based on Richard Crenna's Samuel Trautman from the *Rambo* movies.

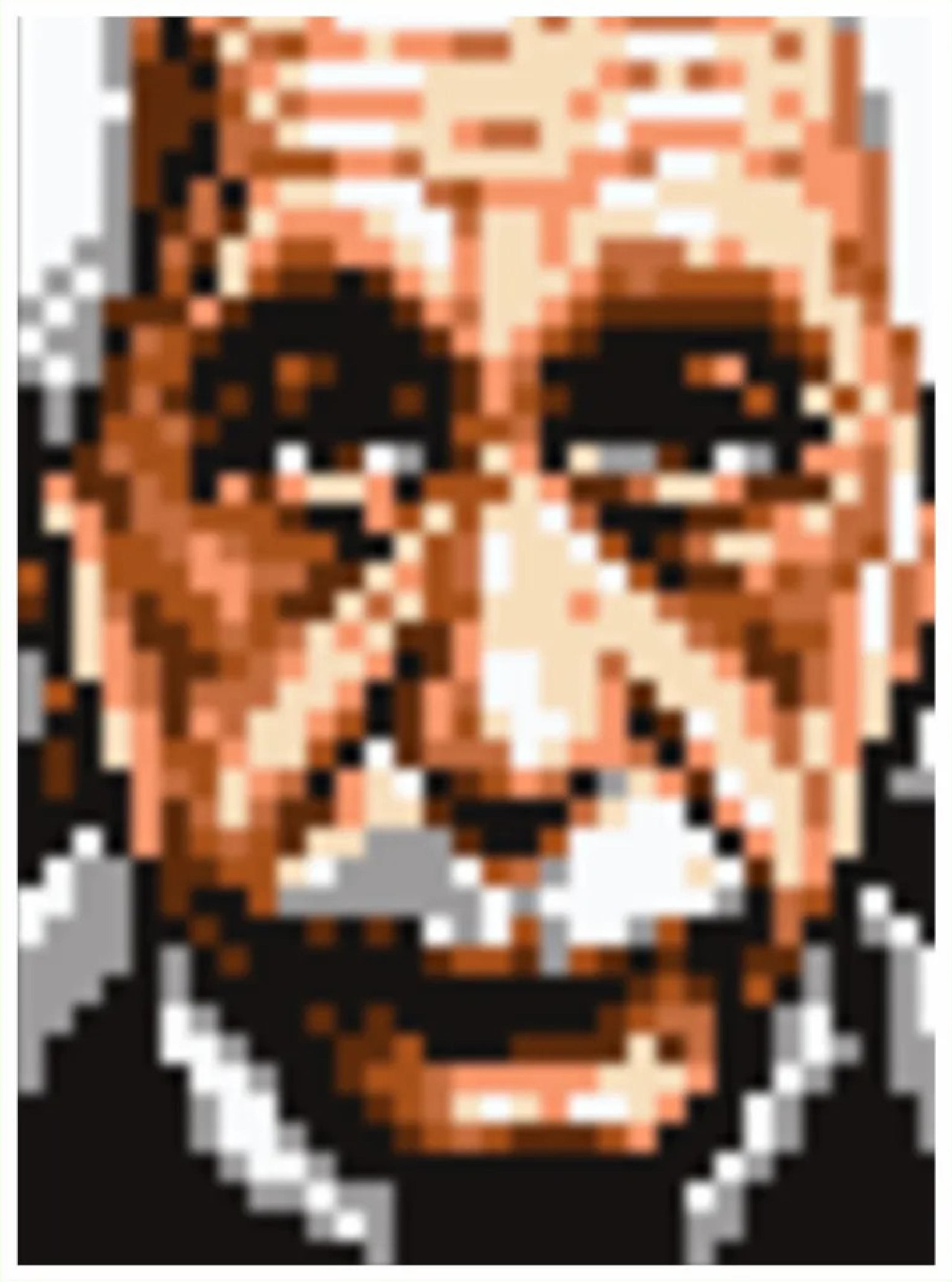


HOLLY WHITE

American freelance journalist Holly White won a Pulitzer Prize for her report on Afghanistan, and a Grammy for documentary Unknown Bloodstream. She is also beautiful, having worked as a model for Depeche Vogue magazine. The attractive, well-informed journalist character is seen in thousands of movies (April O'Neil from *Turtles* among legions of others) and her image is somewhat akin to the time's screen queen Christina Applegate.

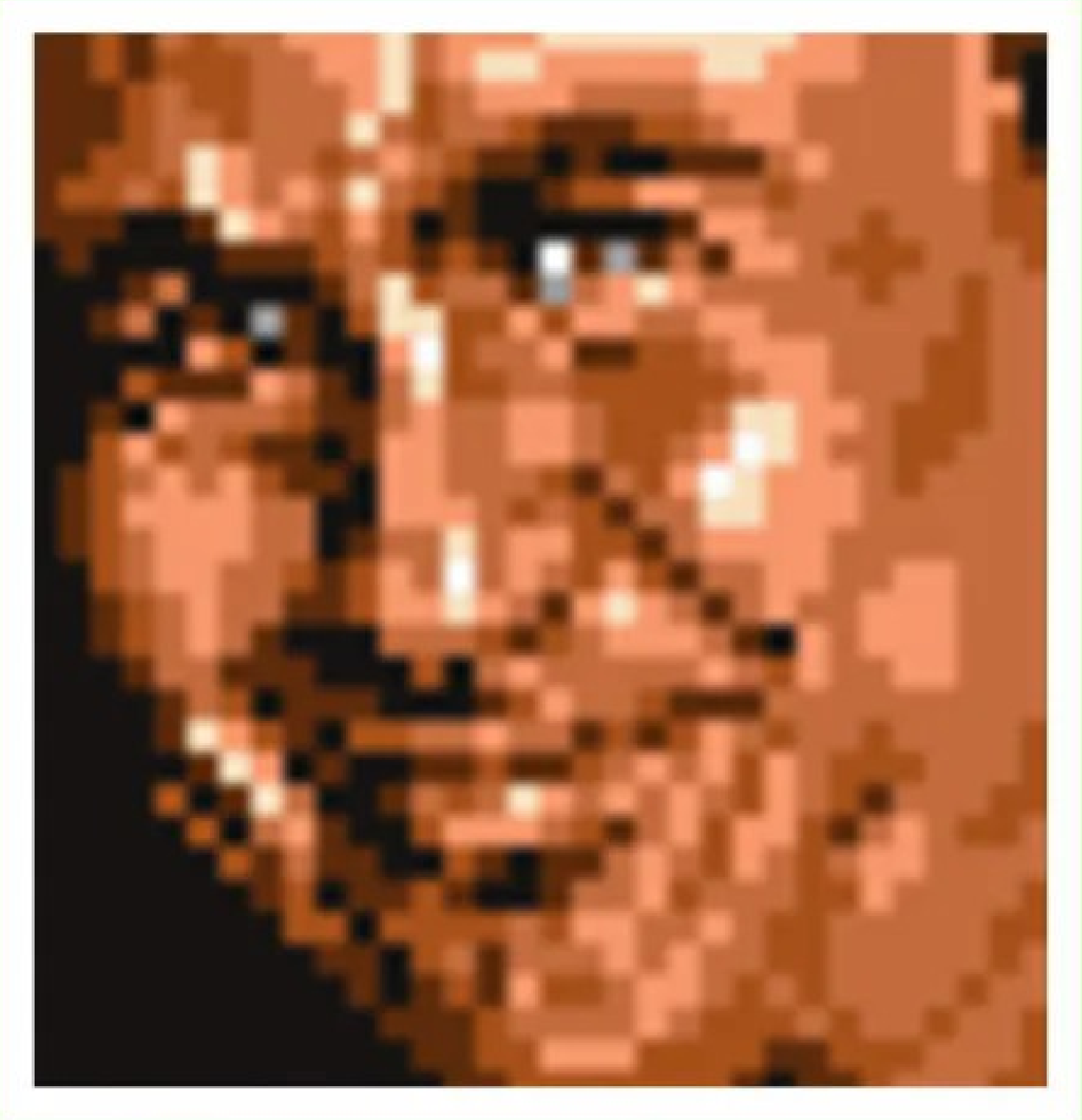
DR DRAGO PETTROVICH MADNAR

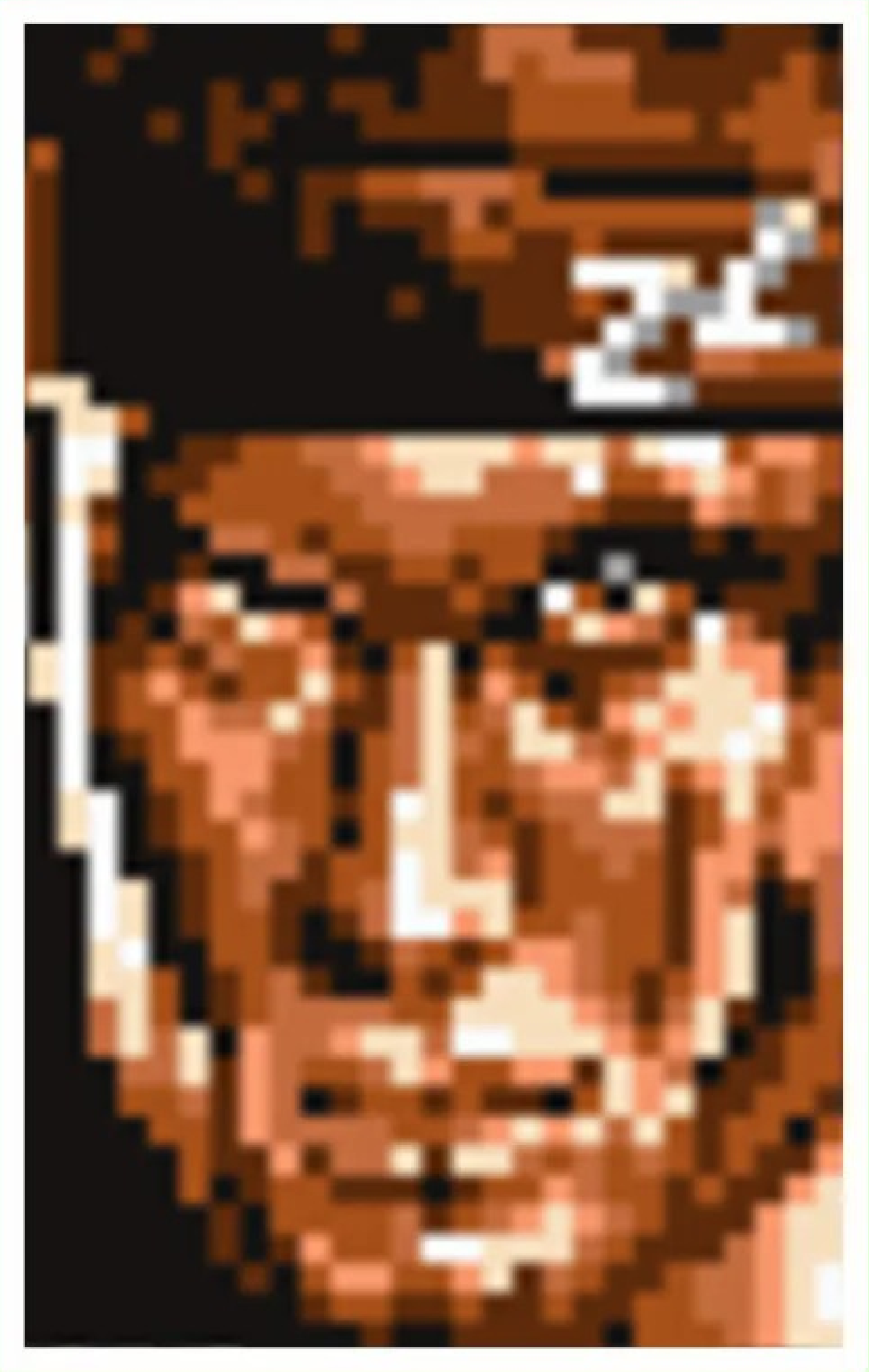
Familiar to all as a good scientist turned mad, Dr Drago Pettrovich Madnar created the Metal Gear TX-55 prototype. Despite being captured, along with his daughter, in Metal Gear, Madnar returned voluntarily to Outer Heaven to oversee the development of Metal Gear D. His image is so iconic it needs no explanation… he's Einstein.



YOZEF NORDEN

Yozef Norden (renamed Johan Jacobsen in the mobile phone/ PS2 versions) is a zoologist and authority on endangered species. He was near Zanzibar Land at the time of Operation: Intrude F014 and helped Snake to deal with animals. His appearance is similar to Danny DeVito.

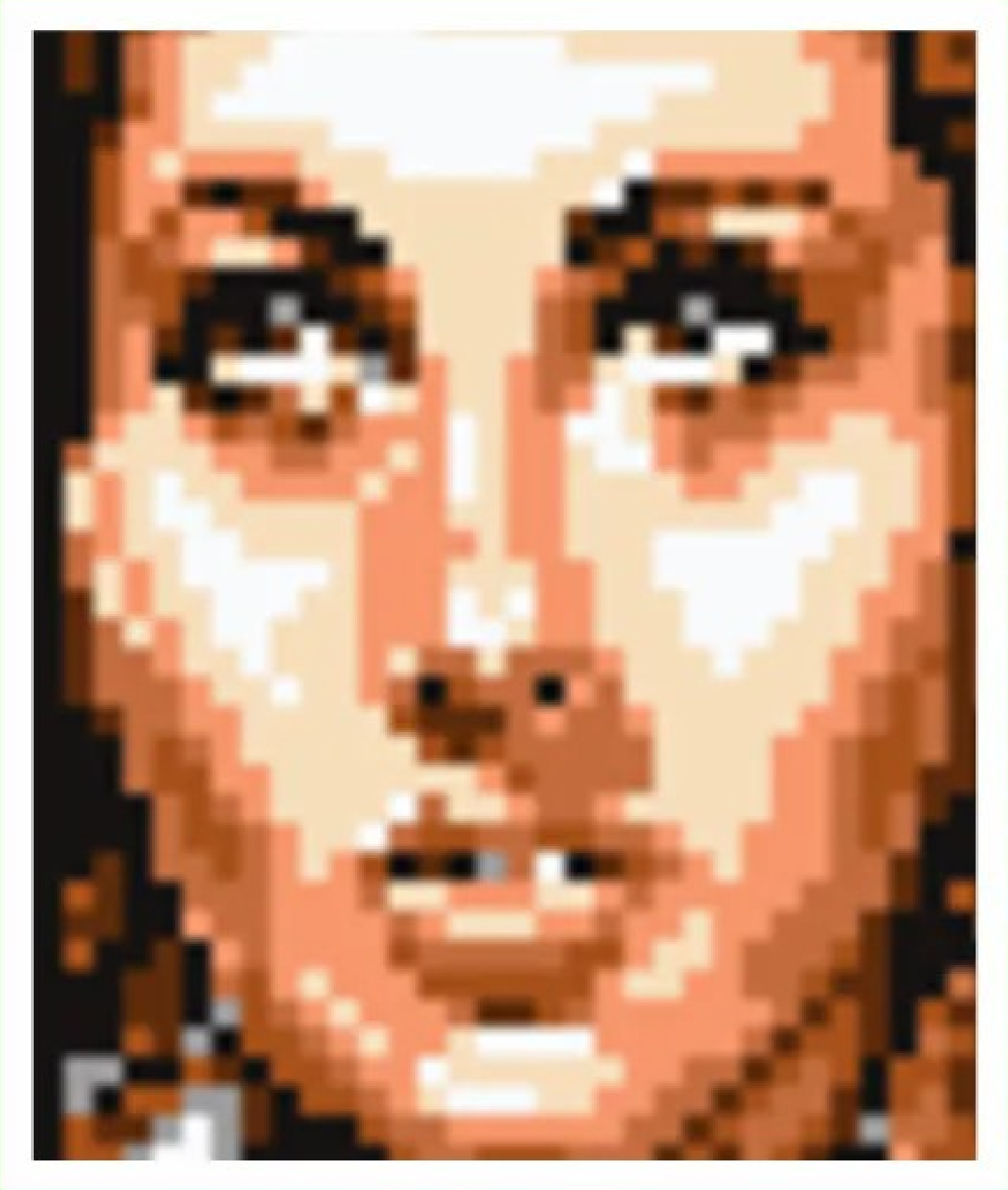




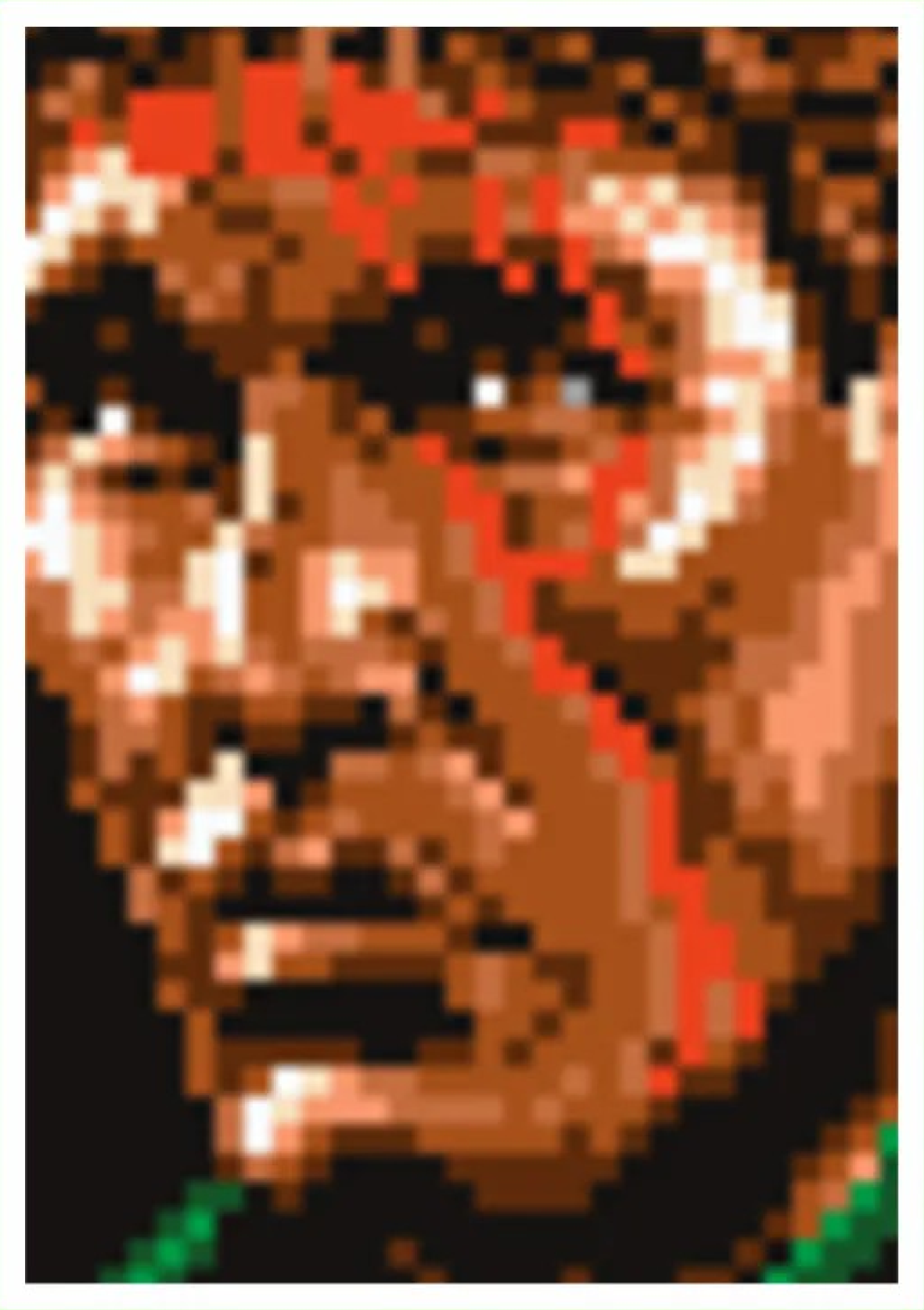
GEORGE KASLER

A member of FOXHOUND during Operation: Intrude F014, Kasler is a mercenary with intel on everyone. FOXHOUND hired him as an arms advisor during the Zanzibar Land conflict and told Solid Snake about Gray Fox during their showdown at the end of *Metal Gear: Solid Snake*. He resembles Dolph Lundgren.

NATASHA MARCOVA



Natasha Marcova (subsequently Gustava Heffner) was a member of the Czech State Police, responsible for the protection of Dr Kio Marv during the Zanzibar Land incident. Their plane was hijacked by Zanzibar Land soldiers, but she managed to escape, disguised as a Zanzibar soldier. Her former lover, Gray Fox, killed her with a missile while she was with Solid Snake. Her relationship with Gray Fox echoes that of a relationship in the JC Pollock novel *Crossfire*. Natasha also resembles Forties screen siren Gloria Grahame.

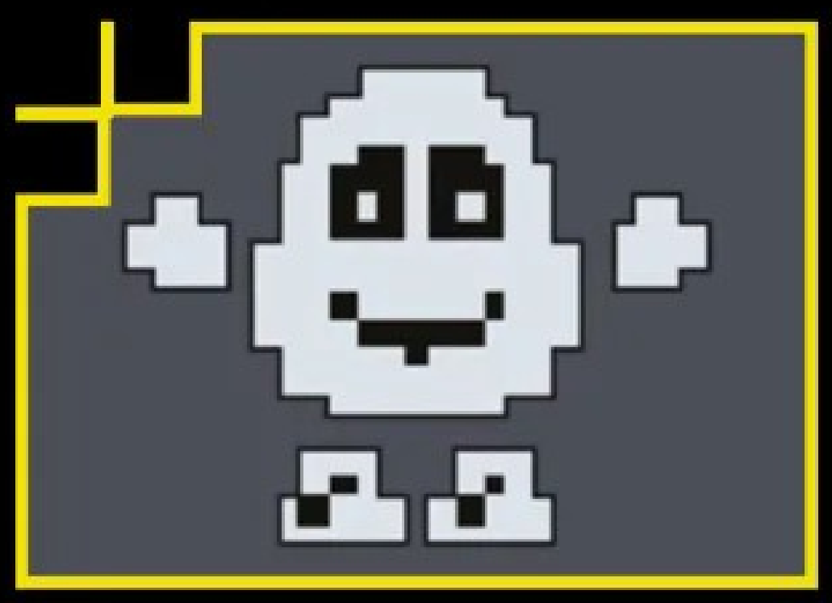


GRAY FOX

FOXHOUND agent Frank Jaeger was the only agent to achieve the FOX codename, FOXHOUND's top commemoration. Gray Fox was Solid Snake's close friend after Operation: Intrude N313, but loyalty to his father, Big Boss, saw them conflict at the end of *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. His character and design are reflected in Tom Berenger's Sgt Bob Barnes in *Platoon*. Gray Fox shares his first name with *Crossfire*'s protagonist Frank Kessler.

DIZZY ★ ★ ★

He's the most famous 8-bit hero to ever grace microcomputers, starring in countless classics. Find out more about gaming's good egg



ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** DIZZY
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** DIZZY
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** DIZZY: PRINCE OF THE YOLK FOLK (2011)
- **» FINEST HOUR:** FANTASY WORLD DIZZY
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** TUMBLING

Shell-shocked is probably the best expression to explain our reaction after we called time on our online poll and saw that the readership had selected Dizzy to be our final Hall Of Fame inductee. After all, Dizzy was up against some pretty big names. However, after revisiting Dizzy's games to research and write this article, we realised that there was more to this unassuming character than we first thought, and that in many respects Dizzy is a fitting hero to include in the Hall Of Fame.

Until his popularity was later eclipsed by Lara Croft many years later, Dizzy was the closest thing Britain had to an iconic platforming game hero after he rolled onto our monitors in 1986. The years before *Dizzy*'s release were proving a glum time for Thatcherite Britain, with the early Eighties recession hitting unemployment hard, and the Falklands War and Miners Strike of 1984 causing further unrest. At the time, the British computer industry was still very much a cottage industry, but its rapid growth meant it wouldn't stay this way for long.

Working from their homes, many programmers, upon seeing the gloomy state that society was in, looked to inject irreverent humour and fun into their games in reaction. Heroes like Monty Mole and Miner Willy consequently emerged, and their adventures proved perfect, if unexpected, affordable little anti-depressants to help lift people's spirits – well those of the people playing games anyway. In many ways, Dizzy can be seen as the culmination of these whimsical titles and heroes, a character with a series of enchanting, uplifting and humorous adventures that saw him become England's most successful platforming hero of the Eighties.

> **"The early Nineties marked the most prolific period for Dizzy"**

A common tale with many 8-bit heroes, Dizzy came about not through considerate design, but rather an awareness of the graphical boundaries of 8-bit computers. The character was the creation of the Oliver Twins, Phillip and Andrew, and sprang forth from a discussion about ways they could overcome the issues of drawing and animating human characters and display happy, sad and scared expressions on a sprite. This led them to believe that the easiest way to achieve this was to simply draw a big round face. The idea stuck, and after a few tweaks, including the addition of gloves and boots, the egg was prepared.

Published by Codemasters, which distributed all of Dizzy's adventures, sales of Dizzy's first game were initially slow. However, by the release of *Fantasy World Dizzy* in 1988, once word had spread of how fresh and charming this new 8-bit cartoon creation was, Dizzy had become a household name. And by the end of the Eighties, his popularity had swelled so much that the Olivers realised that, in order to cope with demand, they would need to enlist the help of a third party, Big Red Software, while still maintaining creative input.

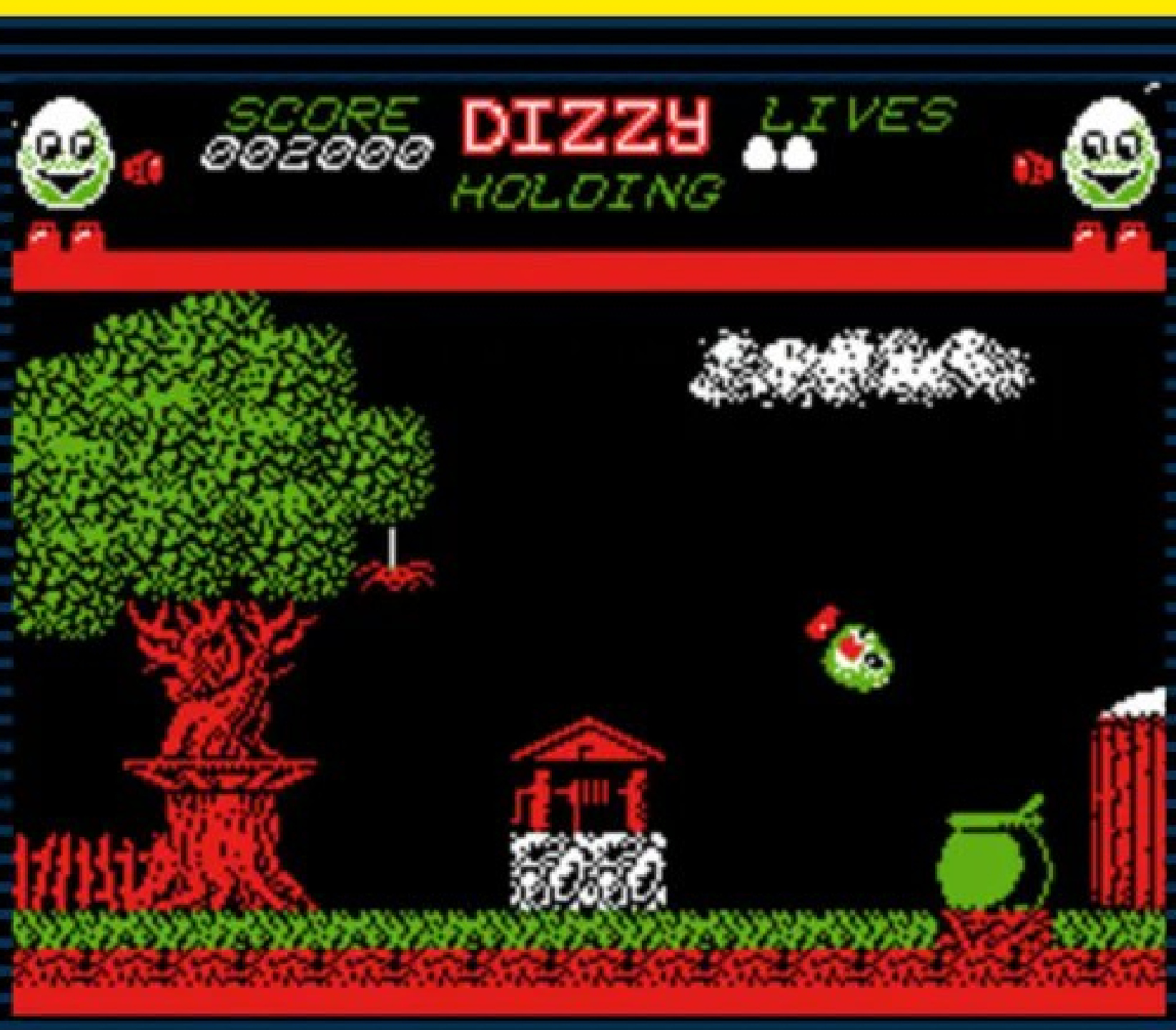
With this extra manpower, the early Nineties marked the most prolific period for Dizzy, with five games released in 1990 alone. However, with global popularity for Nintendo's moustachioed hero growing with every new release, thanks to the popularity of trendy new 16-bit Japanese games consoles and the birth of an edgy new Sega mascot, Dizzy was soon to face his most difficult challenge yet.

With his popularity confined to the UK, the cracks were beginning to show. And in 1993, following a few unsuccessful attempts to break Dizzy into the console market overseas, Codemasters eventually made the decision to stop publishing *Dizzy* games, marking the end of a remarkable era for both Dizzy and the Olivers (we did get an iOS remake in 2011, though).

Notable for being one of the few videogame heroes to have witnessed the growth and progression of the industry in the UK, Dizzy was there in the fledgling years of the computer game scene. He witnessed game development change hands from small two-man partnerships to larger development troupes, and later saw the impact that second wave of game consoles would have on microcomputers and the UK game industry as a whole.

While there hasn't been a new *Dizzy* game since *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* in 1992, we have been treated to several NES remakes that the Oliver Twins discovered while cleaning out their loft. We've also got *Wonderful Dizzy* to look forward to, a new official game due for release on the Spectrum Next. Dizzy is a true British gaming icon who reminds us of the significance and history of those early days of videogames, a period that gave us so many gaming memories and adventures. ✱

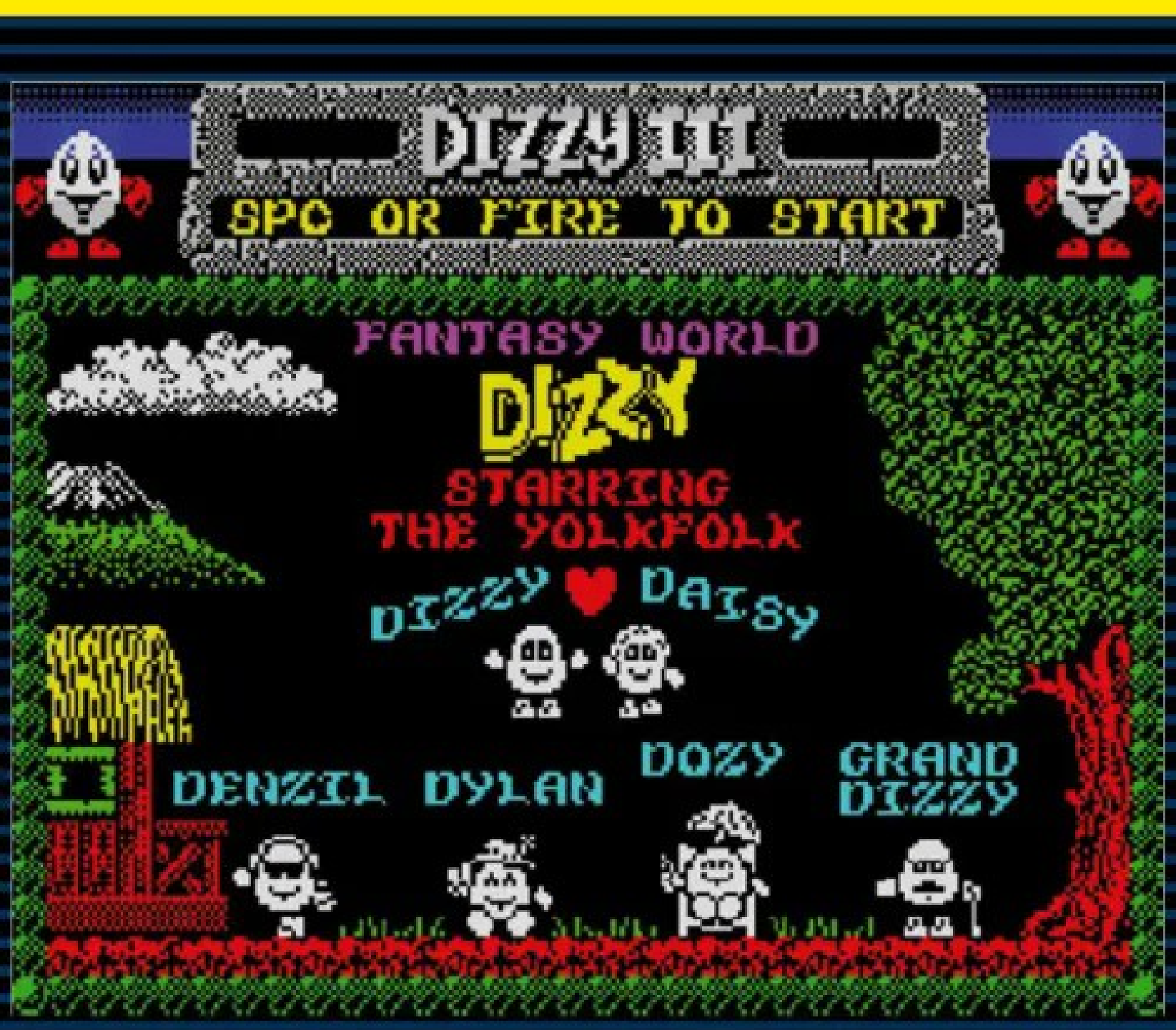
> MAGIC MOMENTS



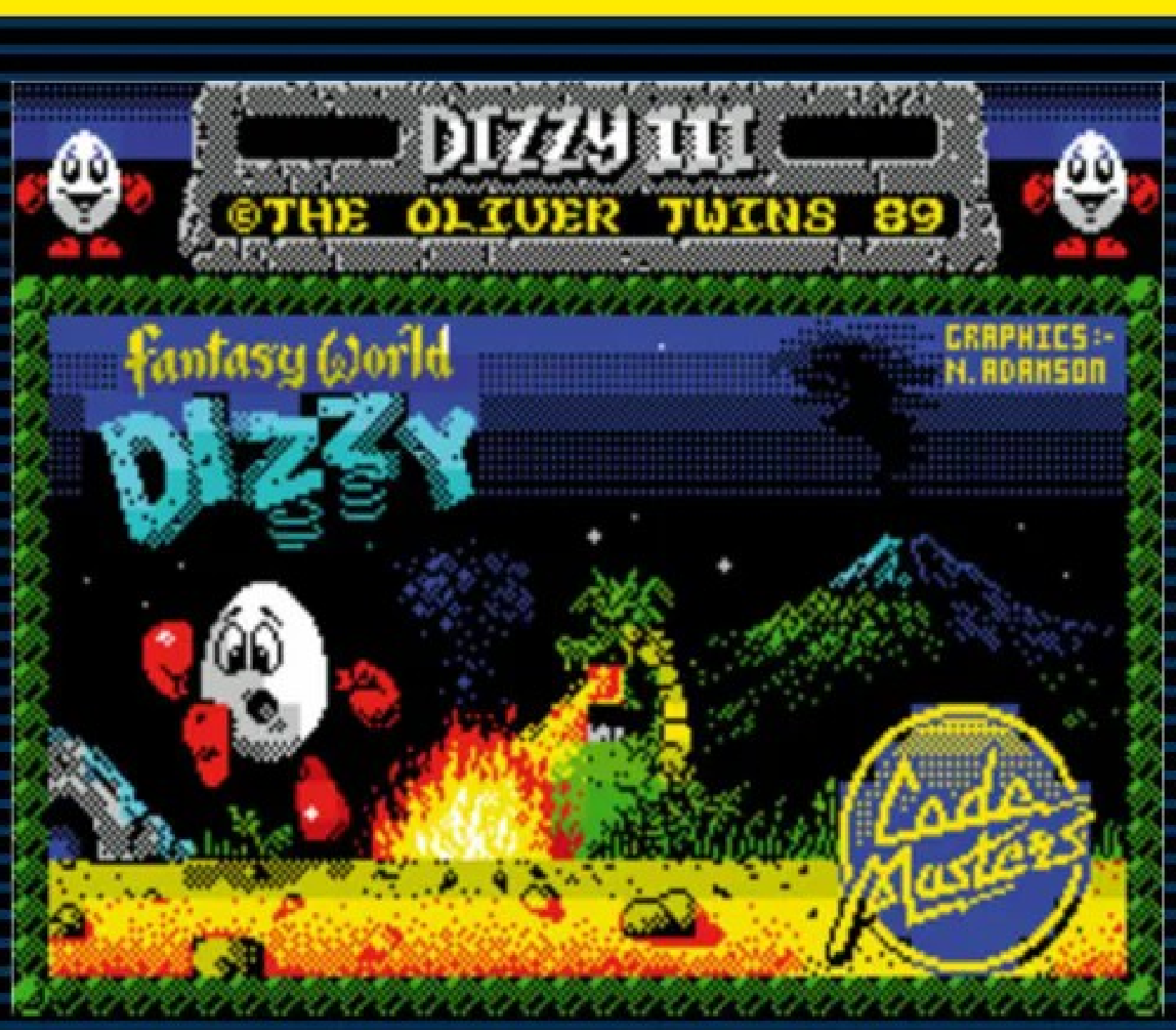
■ Dizzy made his videogame debut in 1986, and slowly grew in popularity with gamers of the day.

FOR ALL DIZZY WHIZZKIDS!
Trade enquiries welcome
How to order...
BY POST...
BY PHONE...0926 814132
CODEMASTERS
SPORTS BAG
MUG
CLOCK
CAP
T-SHIRT

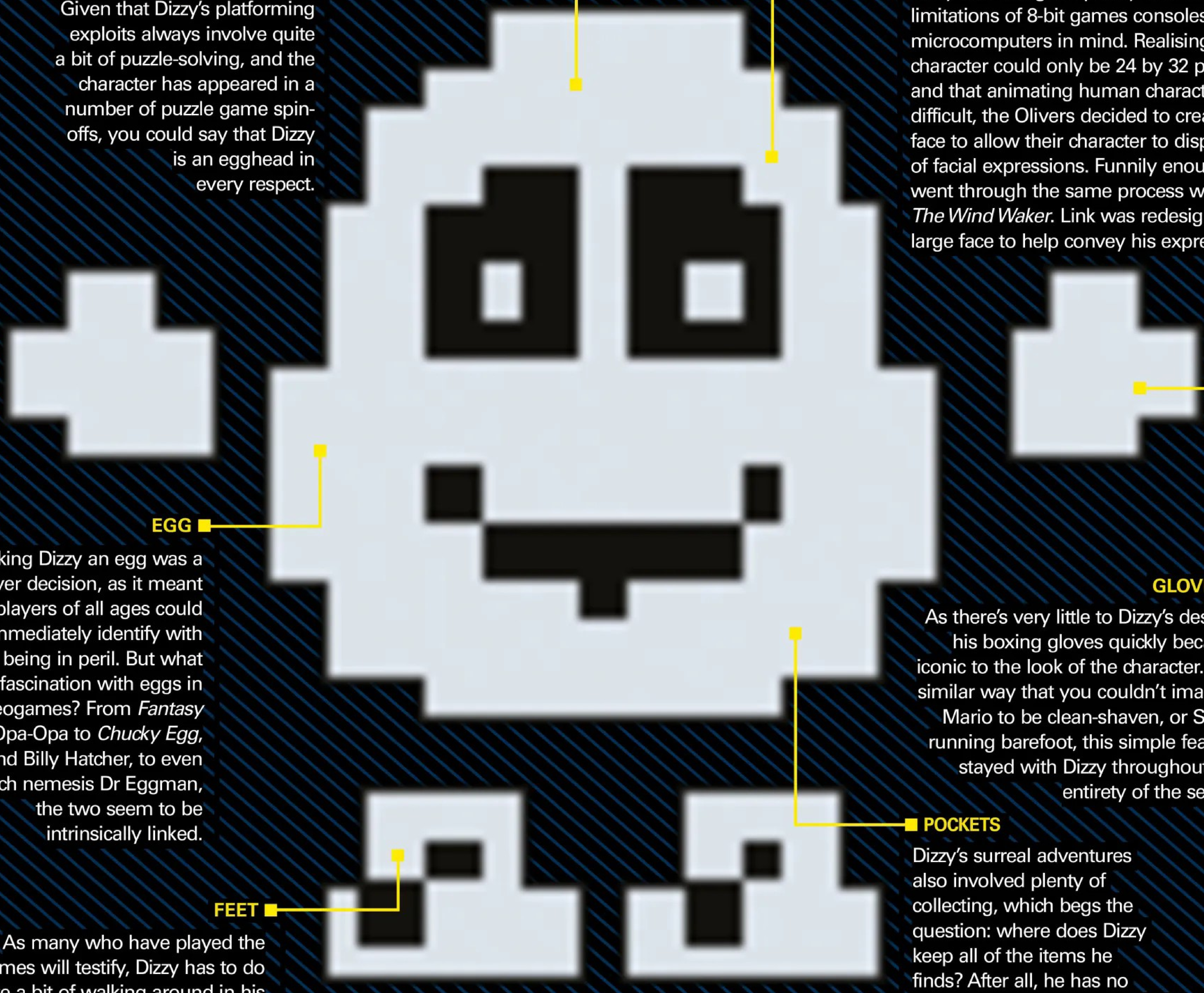
■ Codemasters was canny; licensed bags, clocks and t-shirts were sold. But, oddly, no egg cups.



■ 1988's *Fantasy World Dizzy* introduced the Yolk Folk, Dizzy's scramble of friends and relatives.



■ Dizzy's second sequel, *Fantasy World Dizzy*, introduced ideas that became series staples.



BRAIN

Given that Dizzy's platforming exploits always involve quite a bit of puzzle-solving, and the character has appeared in a number of puzzle game spin-offs, you could say that Dizzy is an egghead in every respect.

FACE

Dizzy was designed purely with the graphical limitations of 8-bit games consoles and microcomputers in mind. Realising that the character could only be 24 by 32 pixels in size, and that animating human characters was difficult, the Olivers decided to create a big round face to allow their character to display a variety of facial expressions. Funnily enough, Nintendo went through the same process when creating *The Wind Waker*. Link was redesigned with a large face to help convey his expressions.

EGG

Making Dizzy an egg was a clever decision, as it meant that players of all ages could immediately identify with him being in peril. But what is the fascination with eggs in videogames? From *Fantasy Zone*'s Opa-Opa to *Chucky Egg*, Togepi and Billy Hatcher, to even Sonic's arch nemesis Dr Eggman, the two seem to be intrinsically linked.

GLOVES

As there's very little to Dizzy's design, his boxing gloves quickly became iconic to the look of the character. In a similar way that you couldn't imagine Mario to be clean-shaven, or Sonic running barefoot, this simple feature stayed with Dizzy throughout the entirety of the series.

POCKETS

Dizzy's surreal adventures also involved plenty of collecting, which begs the question: where does Dizzy keep all of the items he finds? After all, he has no pockets and you can see right through his sleeves.

FEET

As many who have played the games will testify, Dizzy has to do quite a bit of walking around in his games. It's fortunate that the Olivers blessed their creation with feet and a pair of sensible walking boots.

■ A video shows how Dizzy would have looked on the PS2 (www.fantasticworlddizzy.co.uk.).

KWIK
00000
SNAX

■ Dizzy appeared in a series of spin-off games, such as the very playable *Kwik Snax*.

Dylan's flower power necklace.

■ Dizzy's popularity shows no sign of diminishing, with a huge number of fan-made games out there.

DIZZY 3 and a Half
SPC OR FIRE TO START
DIZZY 3
THREE..
AND A HALF!
AN XMAS SPECIAL
FOR CRASH READERS

■ This five-screen game was given away as a free covermount on a December issue of *Crash*.

RYU

Capcom's Street Fighter brought personality to a genre, and, arguably, at the heart of that genre was a character. His name was Ryu

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** RYU
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** STREET FIGHTER
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** STREET FIGHTER III: THIRD STRIKE
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** BEING SERIOUS

"Swift as the wind, silent as a forest, fierce as fire and immovable as a mountain", so reads the Fuuikazan (the motto of Japanese warlord Takeda Shingen) often drawn on Ryu's belt. After appearing in over 30 games, Ryu has more than proved his immovability. His perfect combination of moves, Shoryuken (Dragon Punch), Hadouken (Fireball) and Tatsumaki Senpuukyaku (Hurricane Kick) are a bible to all 2D fighting games. Ryu clones permeate the entire 2D beat-'em-up market to such an extent that finding a single fighting game without some form of dragon punch or fireball is virtually impossible. He's a true gaming icon.

Prior to the release of *Street Fighter II* in 1991, beat-'em-ups had failed to find their feet. Games like *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* and *Karate Champ*, but little else. Using its newly developed CPS-1 arcade board, Capcom unveiled *Street Fighter II*, and the entire genre was turned upside down almost overnight. Suddenly, there were eight playable characters, instead of just one, plus a stable of moves for each. Not only did this increase gameplay but it also gave rise to personality in the genre, as gamers could choose their favourite character and fighting style. Favouritism led to fandom and finally to a kind of personal heroism. Every character had their fan base but it was Ryu that would capture the heart of the genre.

Very much the 'wandering warrior' archetype, Ryu battles not so much for victory as for the fight itself and for the spiritual journey, a personality that is reflected in his appearance – he wears nothing more than his traditional Gi (karate outfit), black belt and headband. An orphaned child, Ryu was adopted and trained in the Nin-Ansatsuken martial art by Gouken, who also introduced Ryu to his sparring partner and surrogate brother, Ken. At age 23 Ryu set off to enter the first World Warrior tournament, encountering Sagat and permanently scarring him with a lethal Metsu Shoryuken attack.

The original *Street Fighter* story is purportedly based on the real-life events of Yoshiji Soeno. Soeno, a karate legend, embarked on a solo mission to Thailand (Sagat's home) to face the masters of Muay Thai. Arriving in Bangkok, Soeno's abilities were doubted and he was told by the Rachadamnern Stadium to make a name for himself in Northern Thailand before returning to Bangkok to fight. Soeno did so, earning the attention of Muay Thai master Reiba, 'Dark Lord of Muay Thai'. After defeating Reiba's disciple, Mongkut Kalop, the 'Dark Warrior', Soeno was ready to face the 'Dark Lord of Muay Thai' himself. The similarities are obvious and further evidence can be seen in the Japanese martial-arts comic Karate Baka Ichidai (The Karate Idiot), in which Soeno and Reiba are drawn in a near-identical manner to Ryu and Sagat. This reference to real life continues into *Street Fighter II*; in 1975, a year after Soeno's trip to Thailand, the first World Open was held, pitting fighters of different styles against each other.

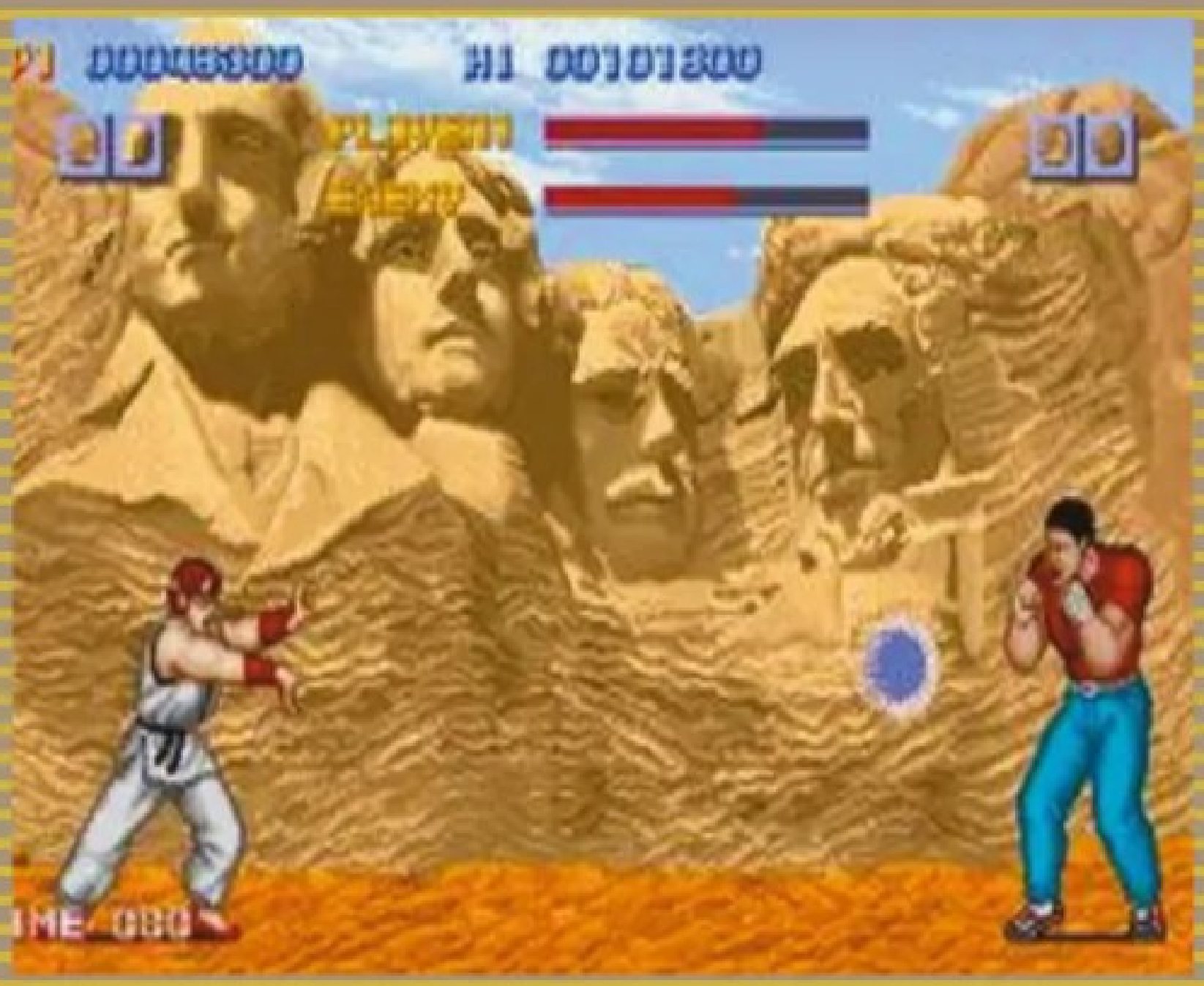
While Ryu's character was changed to that of a con artist, caught up in Guile's war against Shadaloo, for the *Street Fighter* movie, this had very little relevance to his character in the gaming world, leaving his true development to the release of *Street Fighter Alpha* in 1995.

On returning home in the *Alpha* series, Ryu finds Gouken murdered at the hands of Akuma. Ryu vows to avenge Gouken and sets off to hunt for Akuma, finally encountering him on Gokuentou Island, where he learns of the dark power, Satsui no Hadou, inside him, a power that will drive Ryu to kill his opponents. It is this battle within Ryu, the archetypal good versus evil and inner temptation, that has fuelled his character ever since. Originally introduced in Masahiko Nakahira's manga, *Street Fighter Zero*, Evil Ryu was first introduced into Capcom's canon in *Street Fighter Alpha 2*. As with Akuma, Evil Ryu's character is summed up with the signature symbol on his back; in *Alpha 3*, the symbol is Satsu (meaning 'murder'), in *Capcom Vs SNK 2* it is Metsu (meaning 'destruction'). Evil Ryu, however, has never been a character in his own right, serving instead as a 'what might have been' (the closest is *Street Fighter V*'s Kage).

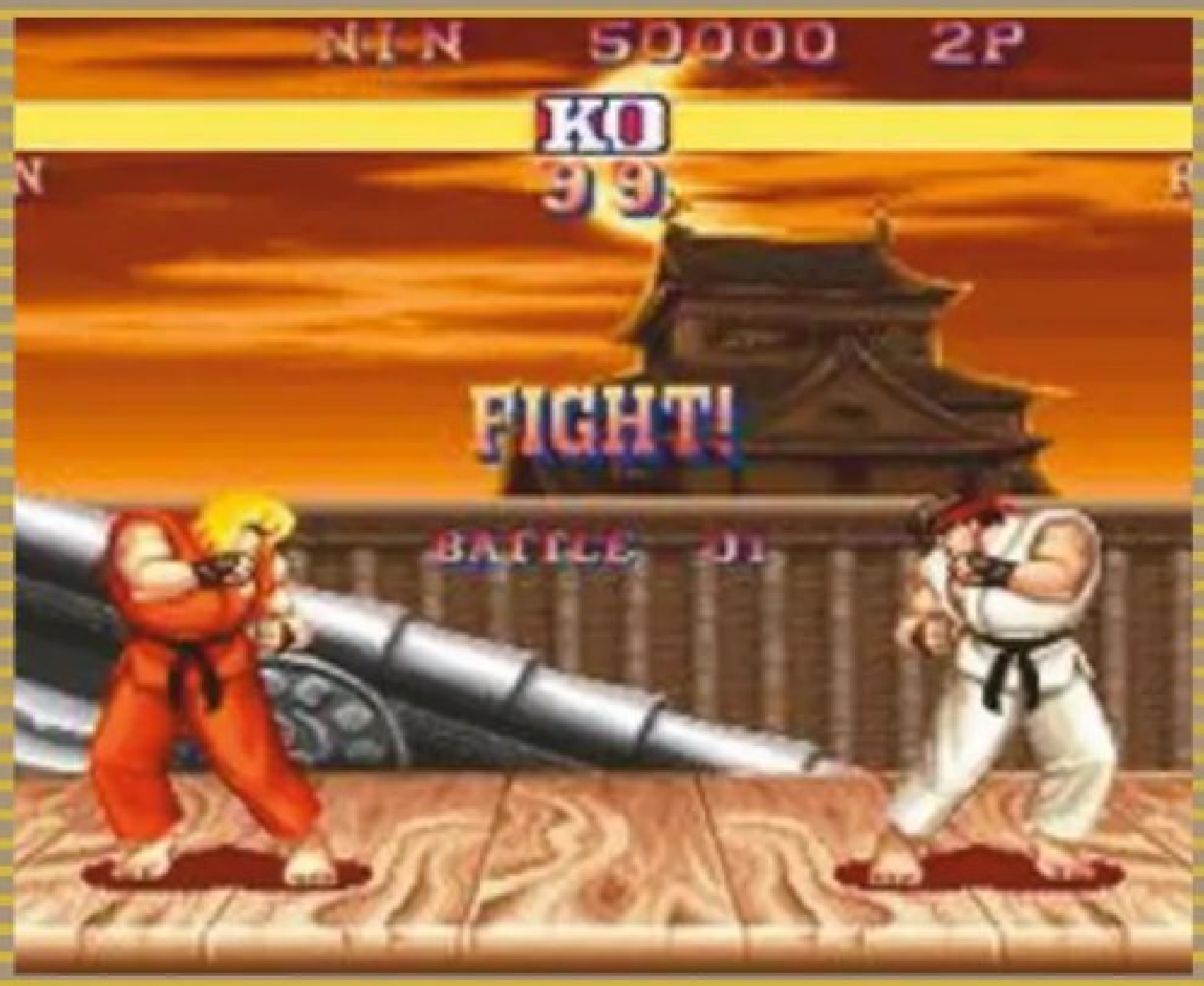
As with almost all games of Street Fighter's fame, the story has made its way into multiple other media. The height of *Street Fighter*'s success has chiselled Ryu's name into the annals of the gaming industry and pop culture. Ryu leapt to fighting supremacy decades ago with a now gospel-like move set, and not once has he been dethroned – he's a true champion. ✱

> **"Capcom revealed Street Fighter II and the genre was turned upside down"**

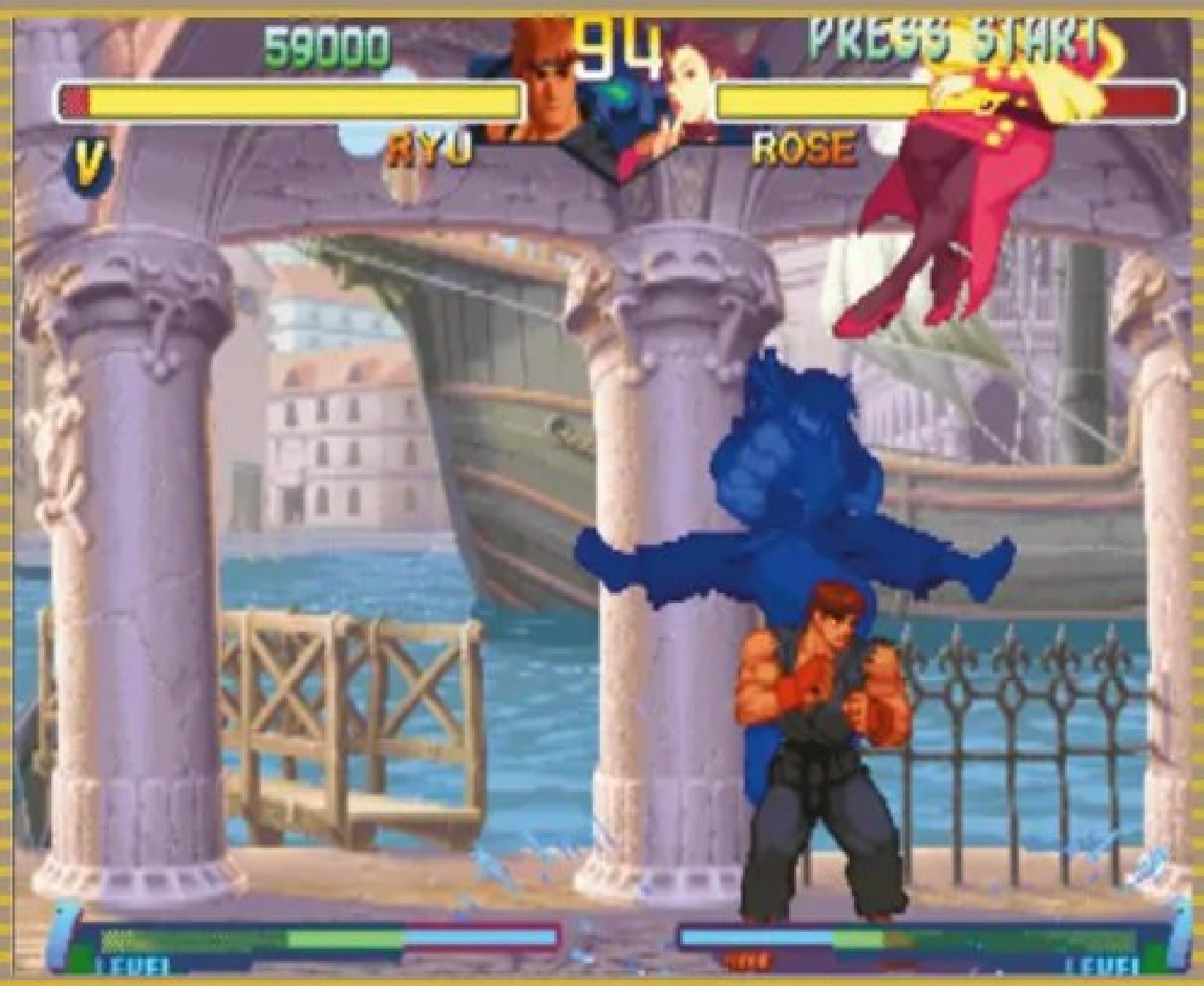
> MAGIC MOMENTS



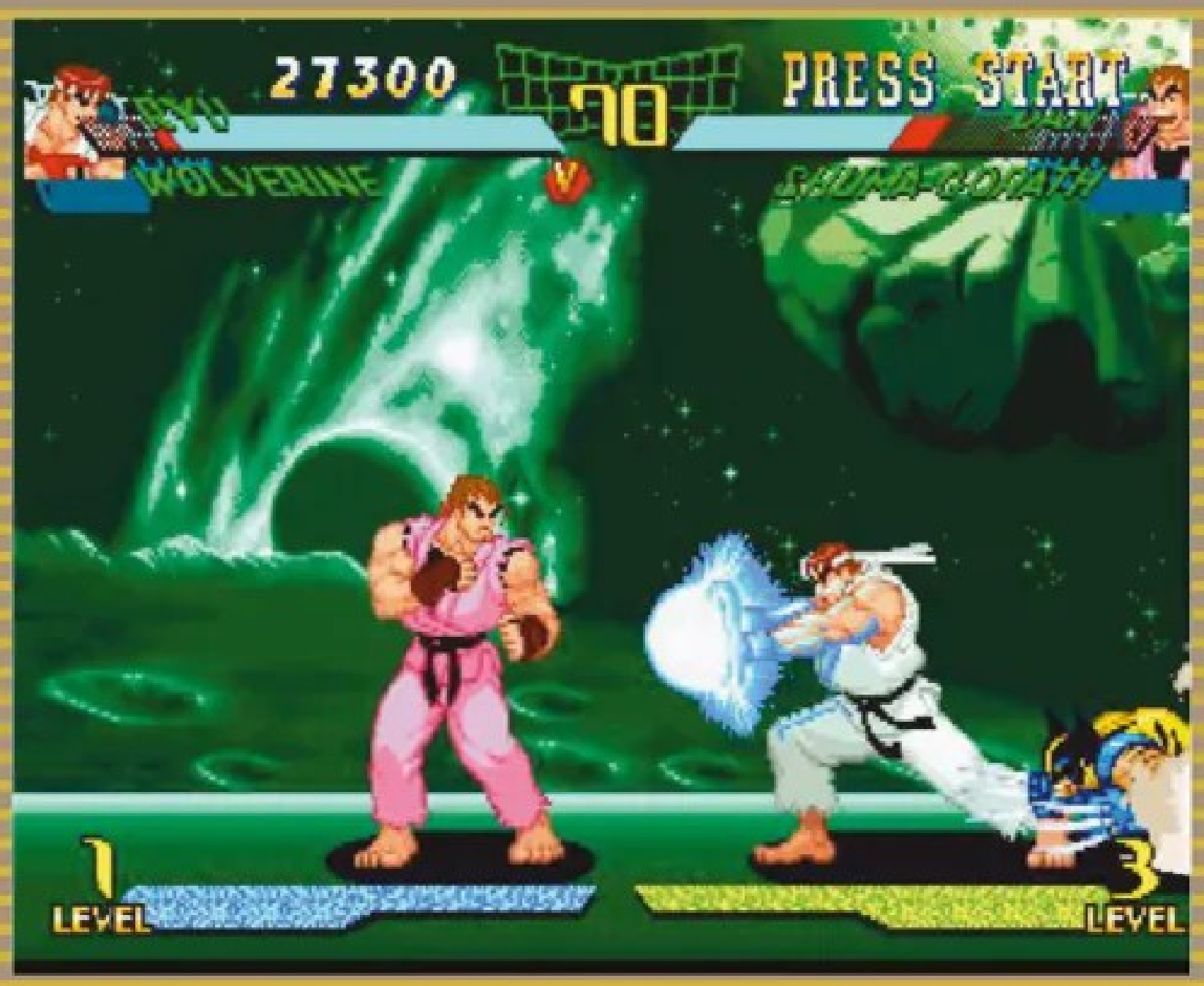
■ The release of *Street Fighter* in 1987 sees the birth of the most important beat-'em-up series.



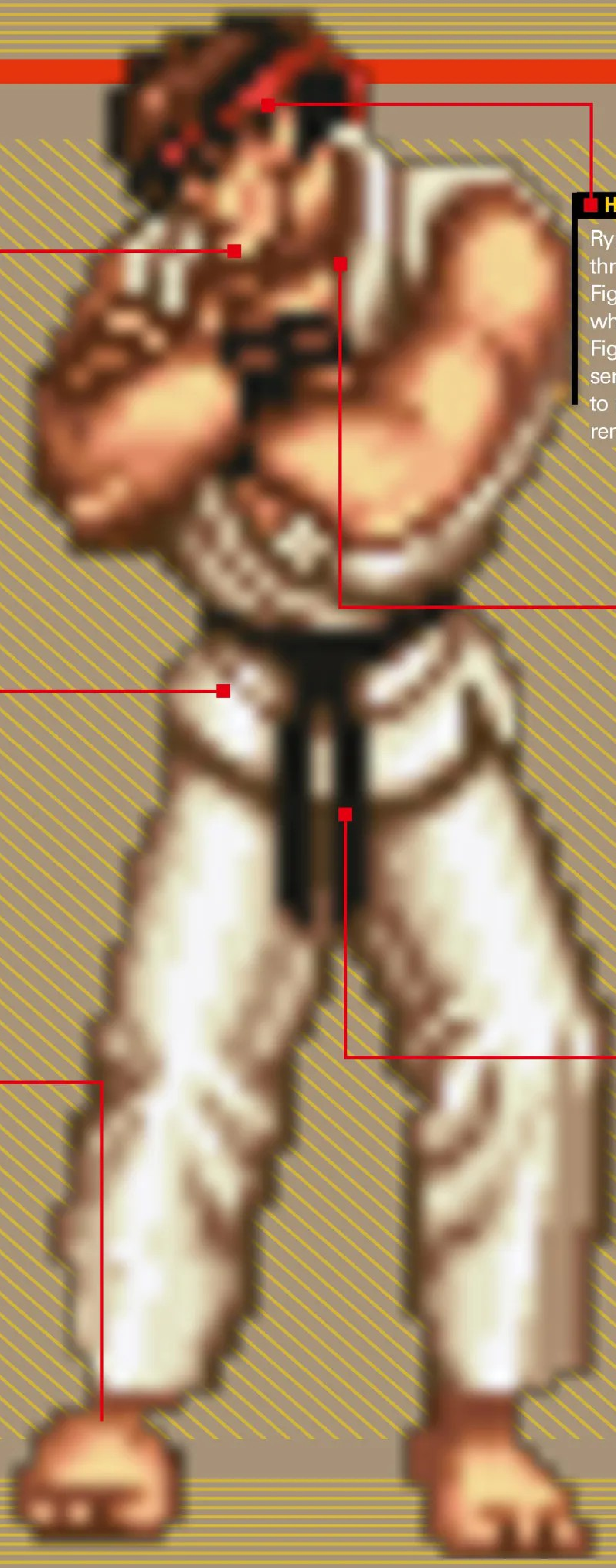
■ What do we need to say? It's *Street Fighter II*. Taker of countless coins, bringer of endless clones.



■ The *Alpha* series saw Ryu's first true character development, with the introduction of Evil Ryu.



■ Take the greatest fighter ever, add some silly over-the-top specials et voilà… awesome fun.



FACE

Ryu bares an uncanny resemblance to martial-art comic Karate Baka Ichida's Soeno, believed to be the original influence for the now legendary character. Ryu's features changed significantly in Street Fighter III, with black hair, brown eyes and much more facial stubble.

GI (OUTFIT)

Training and fighting is Ryu's life, so he is very rarely seen without his Gi – a traditional karate outfit. The Gi would be tattered and torn, from overuse, by the time of Street Fighter III.

FEET

In the original Street Fighter, Ryu wore red slippers, yet in both Street Fighter II and Street Fighter III, he prefers to fight barefoot. Perhaps his vagabond lifestyle has left him unable to afford new shoes. Or maybe he's just that hard.

HAIRBAND

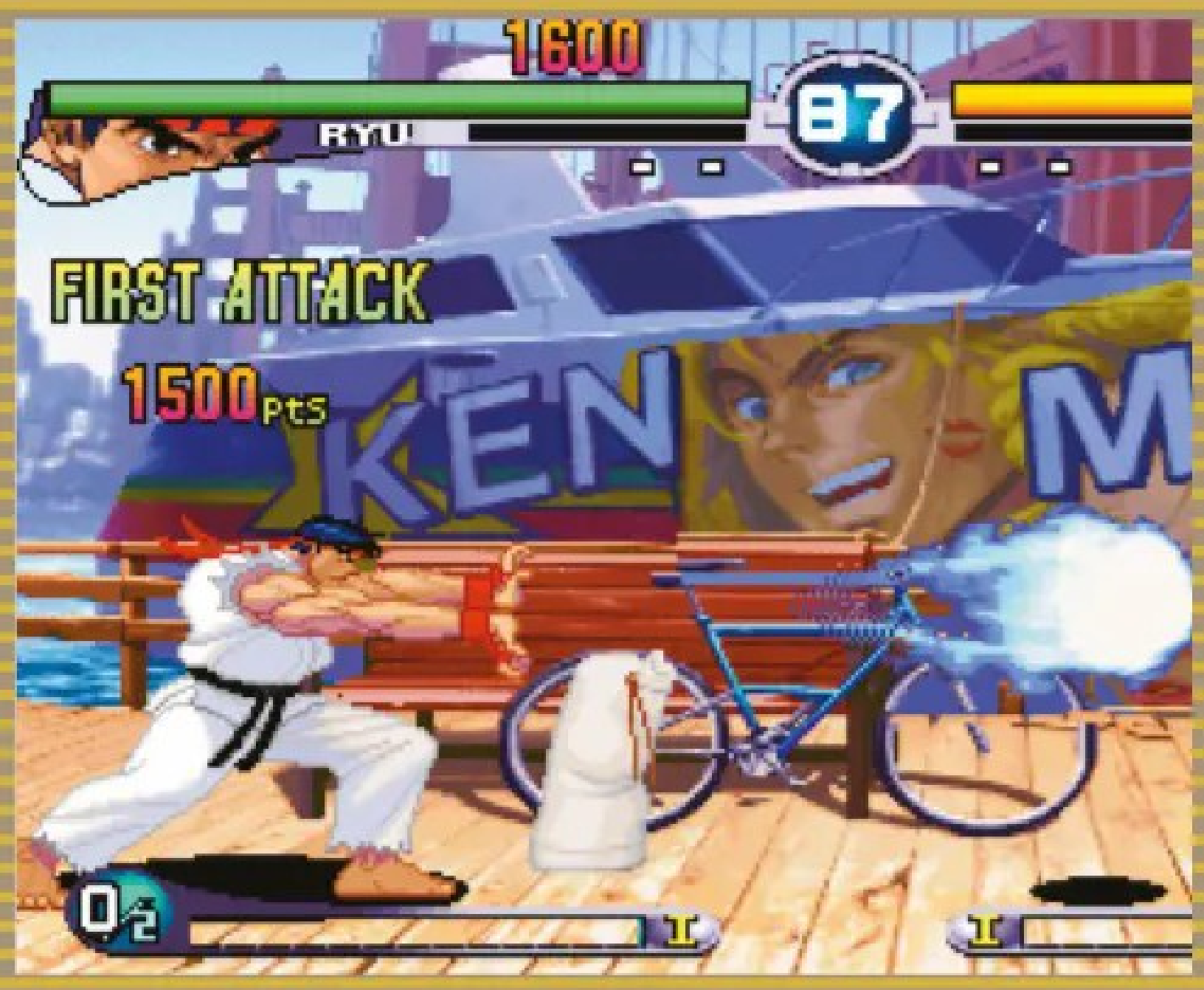
Ryu has worn several hairbands throughout the years. In the original Street Fighter, he sported a white headband, which was switched to red for Street Fighter II. After beating Ryu in the Alpha series, Ken gives Ryu his red hairband to remind him to stay focused and to remember their battle.

NAME

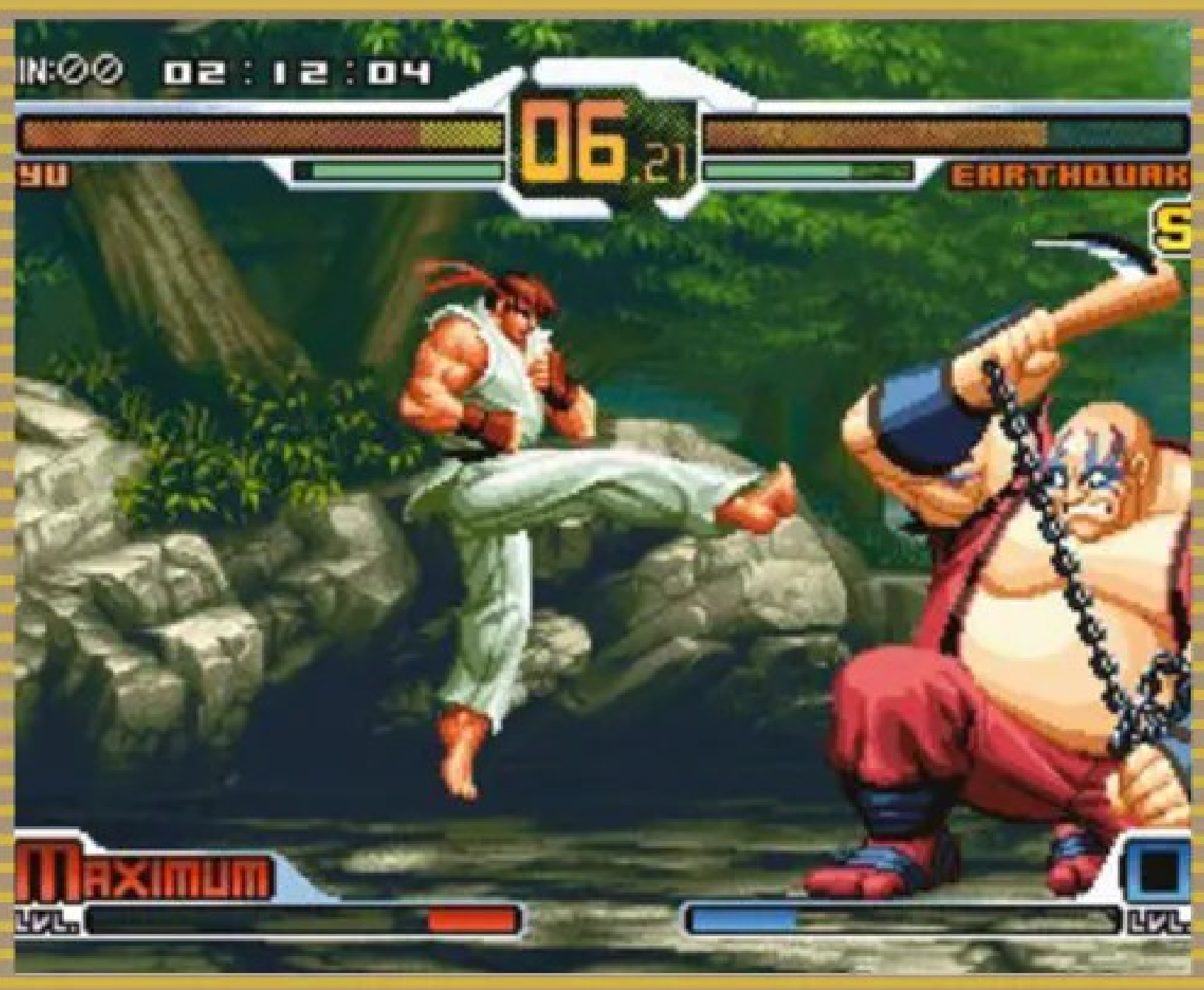
The name Ryu can be translated as meaning 'Dragon', hence 'Dragon Punch'. It is a common name used throughout other Japanese videogames such as Shenmue and Ninja Gaiden but Street Fighter was arguably the first game to use it and remains the most iconic.

BELT

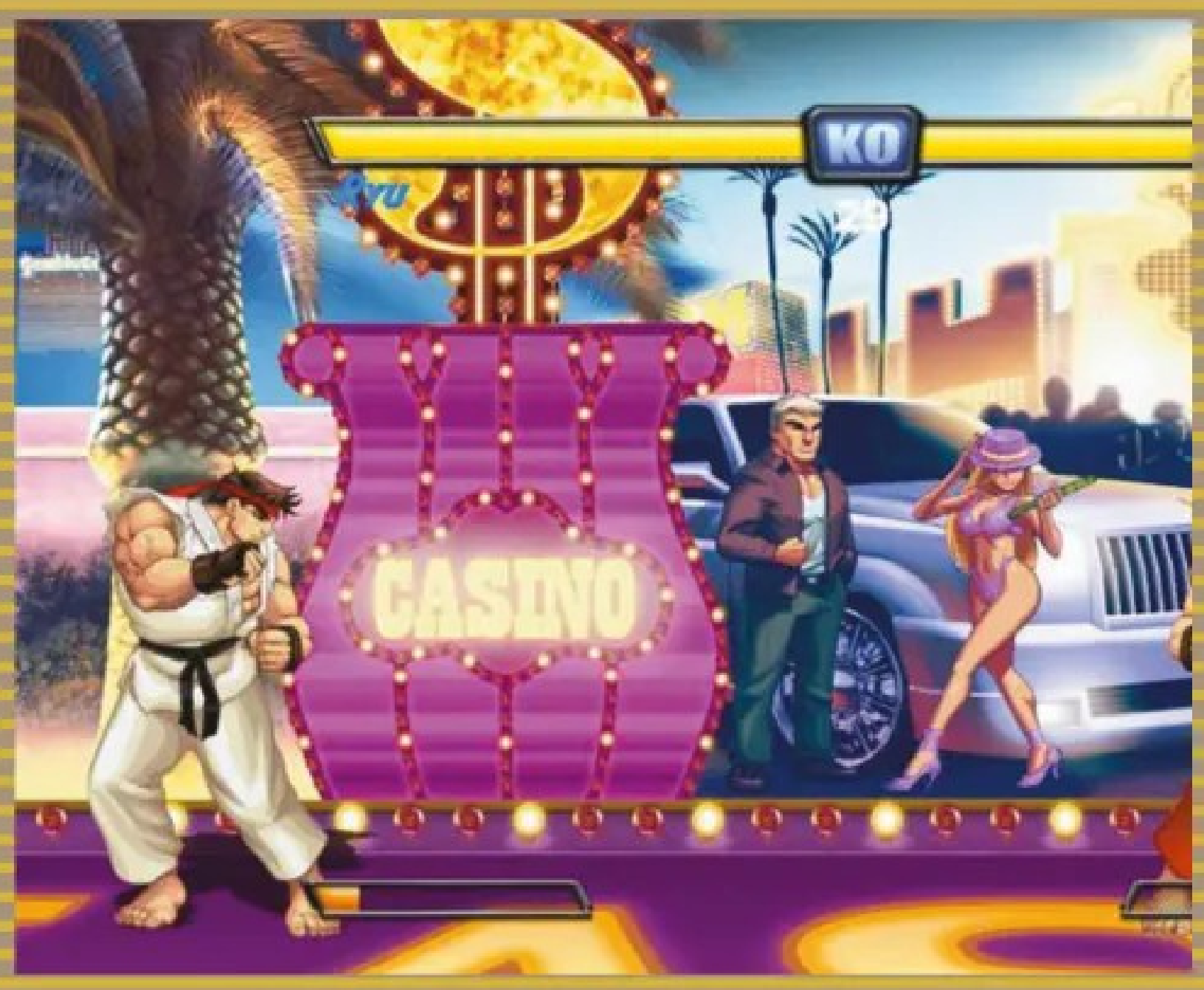
The black belt is, of course, the symbol of a martial-arts master. In some official artwork, the Fuuikazan is written on Ryu's belt. Translated it reads: "Swift as the wind, silent as a forest, fierce as fire and immovable as a mountain." The Kanji (Japanese script) is taken from Tzu's Art of War, a code for battle conduct.



■ Ryu and Ken were the only World Warriors to receive a glorious CPS-3 makeover.



■ SNK took the reins for *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos* and redrew Ryu in its own unique style.

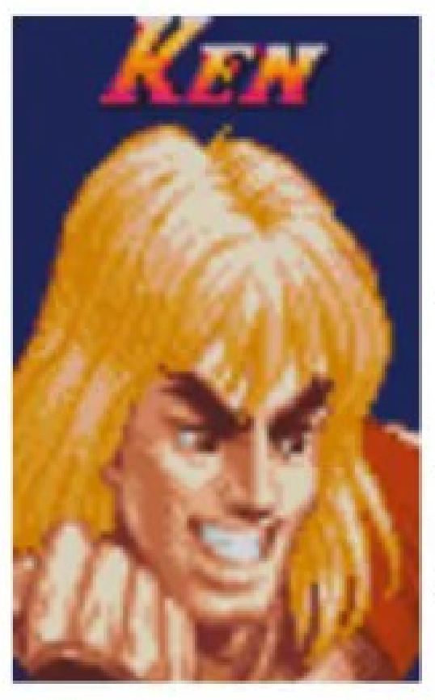


■ Updated for the widescreen generation, Ryu gets a smooth, high-definition makeover in 2008.

■ Ryu and Ken were last seen in Street Fighter V, which ended up being a PS4 console exclusive.

THE WORLD WARRIORS

While Ryu is the most famous character in the Street Fighter franchise there are plenty more. Here are the challengers from the early games

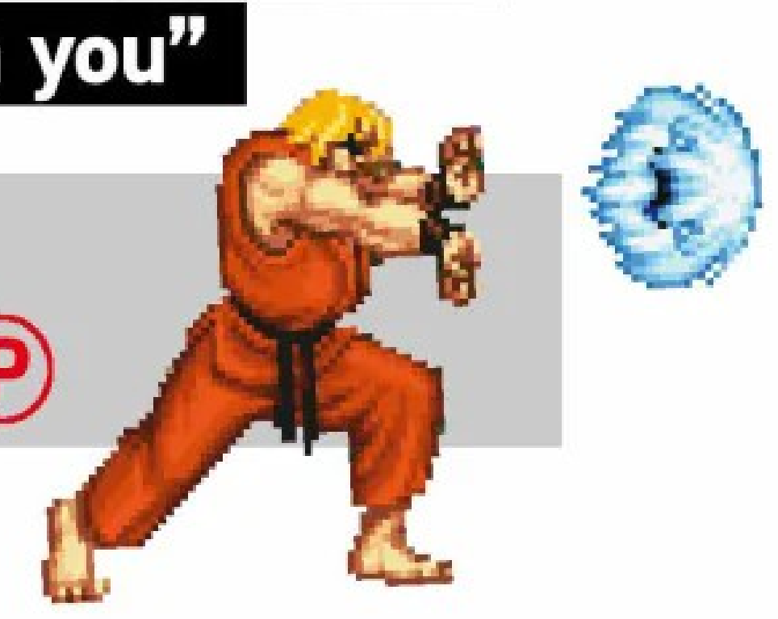


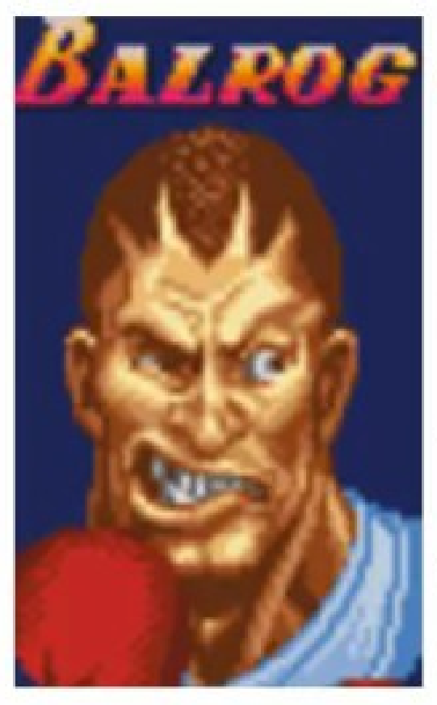
APPEARANCE: Near-identical to Ryu, his red Gi has the arms ripped off and his hair nods towards his free-spirit lifestyle.

"Attack me if you dare, I will crush you"

Hadouken

↓ ↘ → Ⓟ



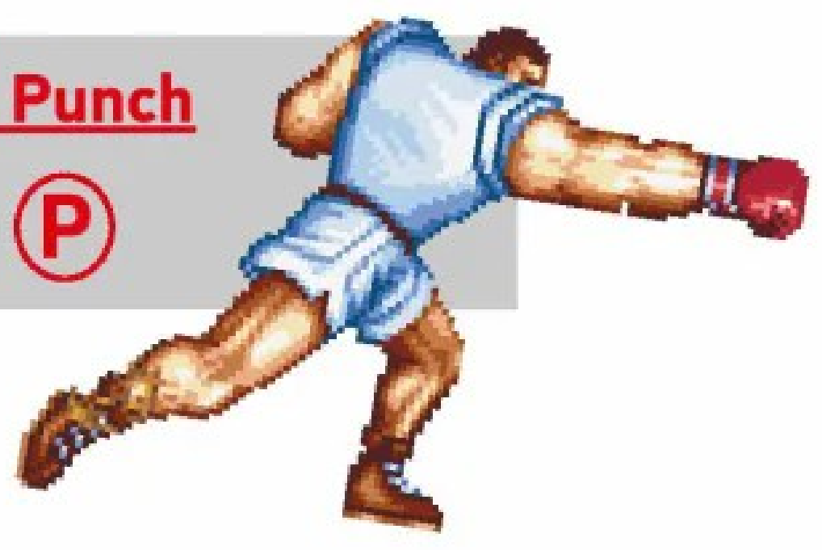


APPEARANCE: It's more than obvious which boxer Balrog's Japanese name, M.Bison, refers to. Add to that the cornrow hairstyle, narrow eyes and huge arms and you've got yourself the self-proclaimed "baddest man on the planet".

"Get up, you wimp"

Straight Dash Punch

← → + Ⓟ



U.S.A.
MEXICO
BRAZIL
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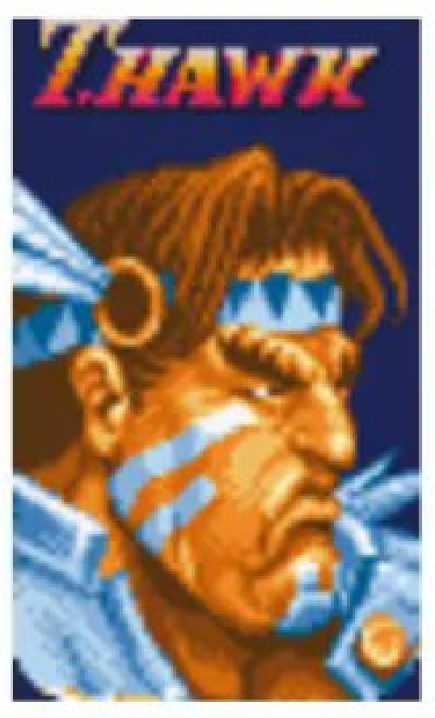
U.S.A.
JAMAICA
SPAIN
EN

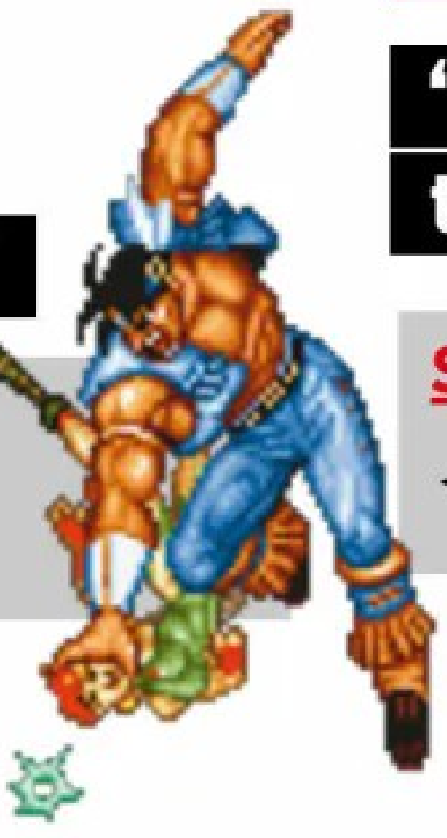


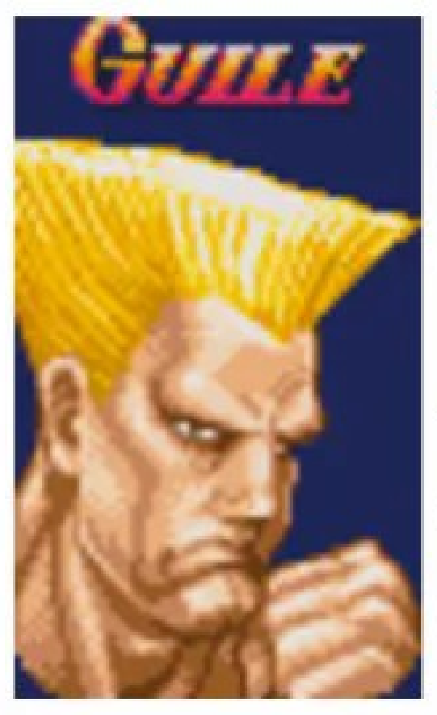
APPEARANCE: T. Hawk's entire design, from his feathered hair and face-paint to his final cross-legged winning pose, is clearly based on Mexican tribesmen.

"Your scream sounds like a pathetic war cry"

Mexican Typhoon

↻ Ⓟ



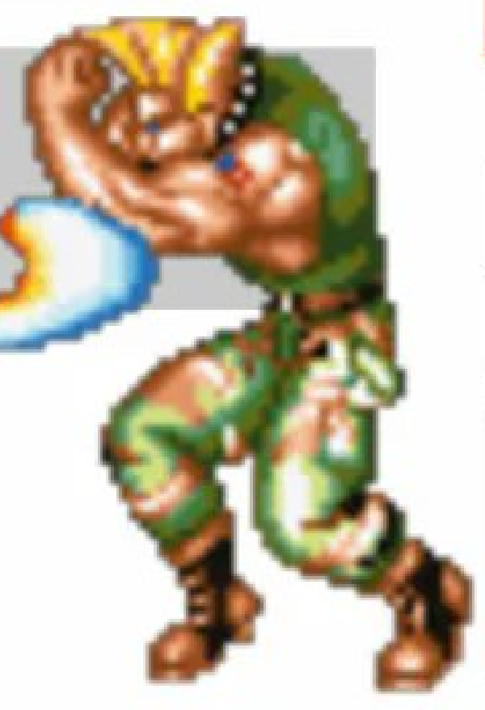


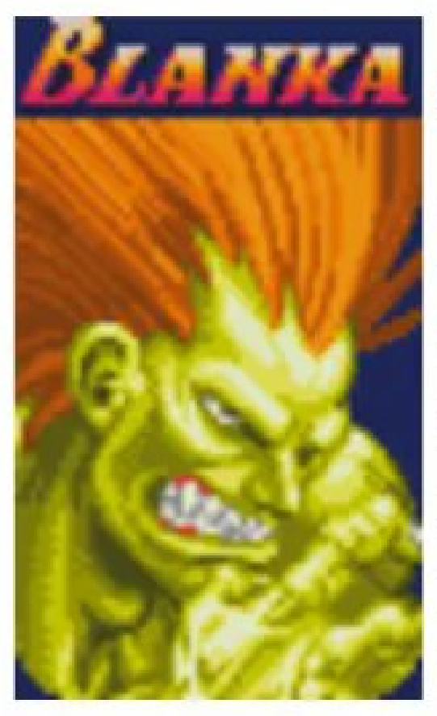
APPEARANCE: Guile's appearance was intended to appeal to American fans, with blonde hair and blue eyes, but most importantly, his army fatigues. His musical theme goes with anything.

"Are you man enough to fight with me?"

Sonic Boom

← → + Ⓟ



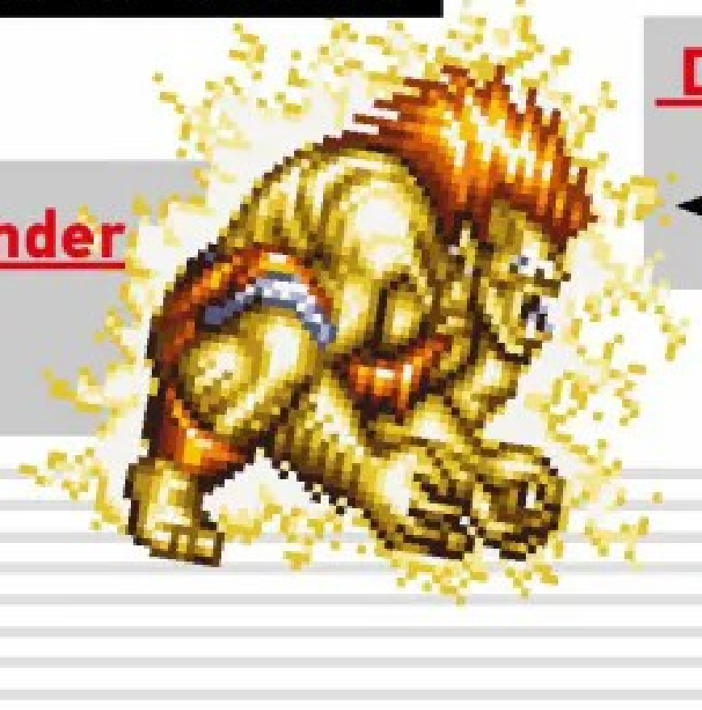


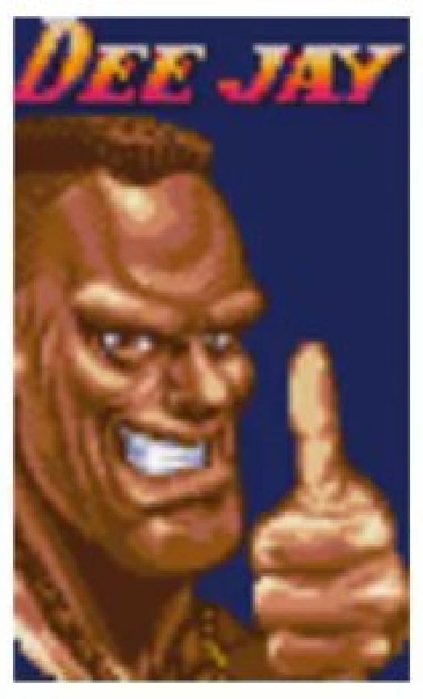
APPEARANCE: The archetypal beast-man, original concept art suggests Blanka was initially intended to be a caveman. Rumour has it that this original design became King Rasta Mon from *Saturday Night Slam Masters*.

"Seeing you in action is a joke"

Electric Thunder

Ⓟ Ⓟ Ⓟ



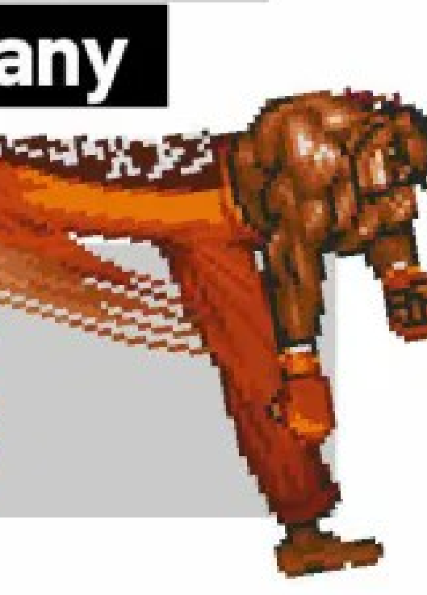


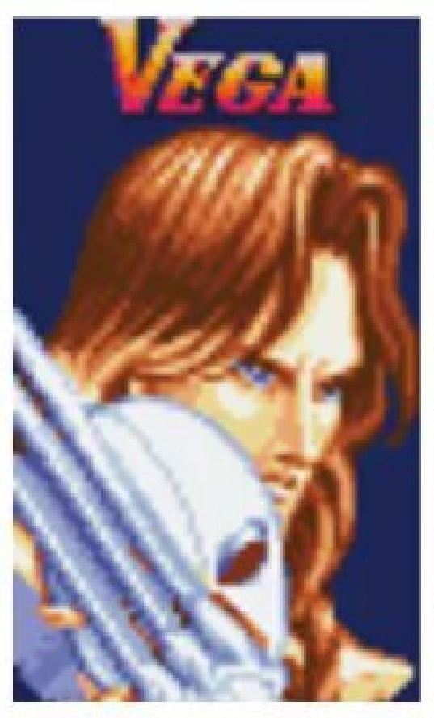
APPEARANCE: Dee Jay's constant smile, thumbs-up gesture, loose drawstring pants and maracas all symbolise the laid-back lifestyle of Jamaica. The only character designed by Capcom USA, James Goddard modelled Dee Jay on martial-arts film star Billy Banks.

"Your problem is that you don't have any rhythm"

Double Dread Kick

← → + Ⓚ



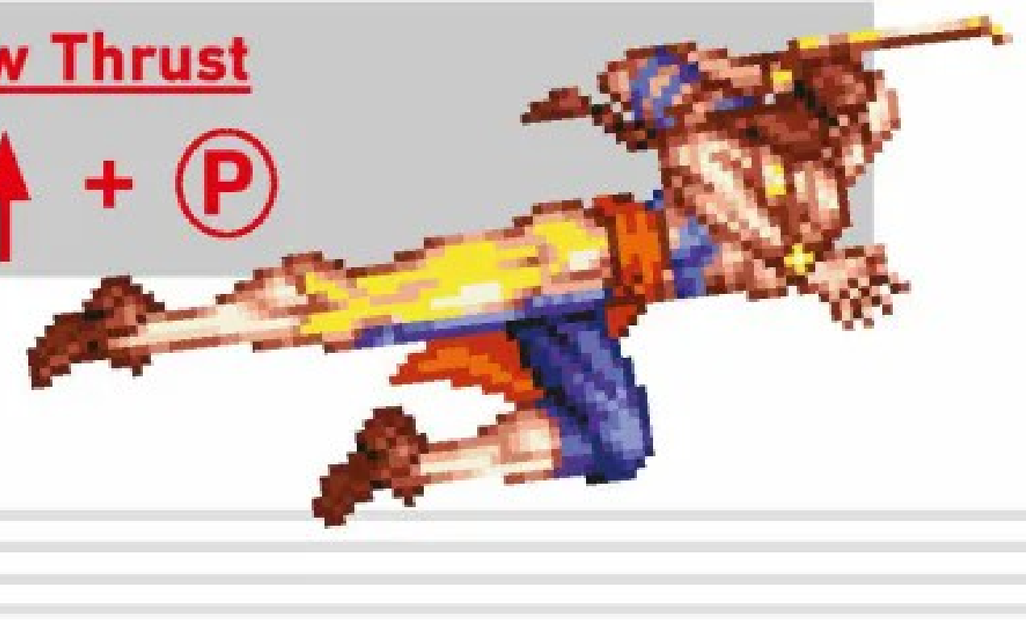


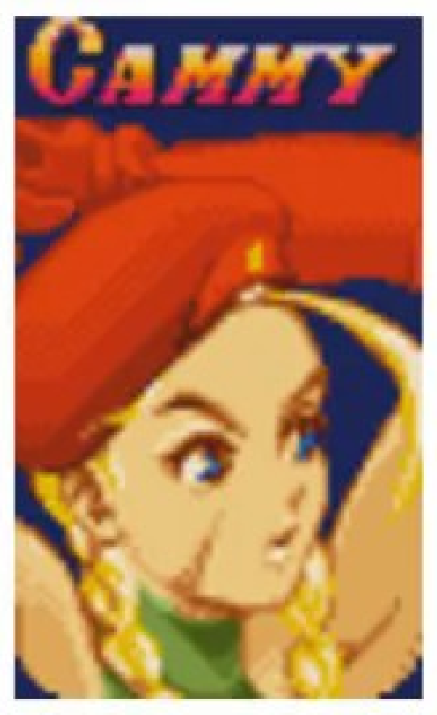
APPEARANCE: Vega's performance is a nod towards the famous matadors of Spain. Early artwork suggests Vega was initially intended to be a knight in armour – his mask and claw are remnants of this.

"Handsome fighters never lose battles"

Claw Thrust

↓ ↑ + Ⓟ

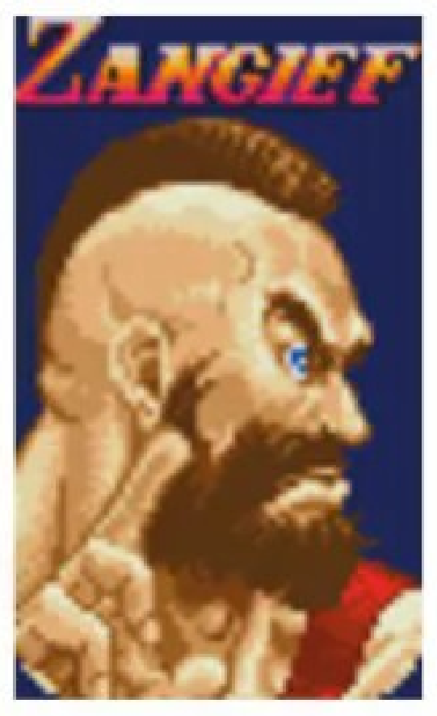




APPEARANCE: As with Guile, Cammy's pale skin and blonde hair are designed to appeal to the American and European audience. She's a fire favourite.

"You must enjoy being beat. Let me remodel your face one more time"

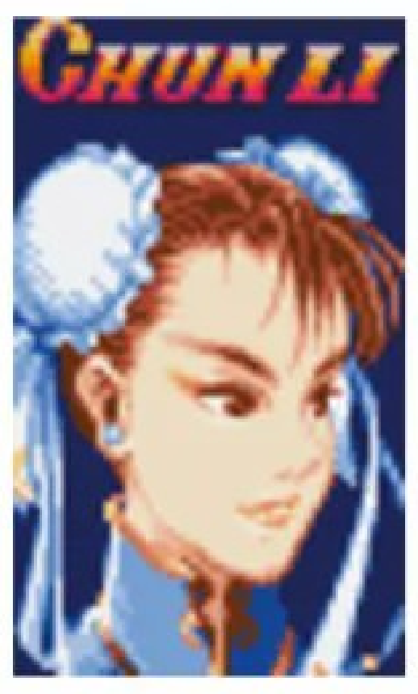
Cannon Drill
↓ ↘ → Ⓚ



APPEARANCE: Zangief's design is of the stereotypical large, muscular Russian. His size is emphasised by his lack of clothing and he fights bears.

"My strength is much greater than yours"

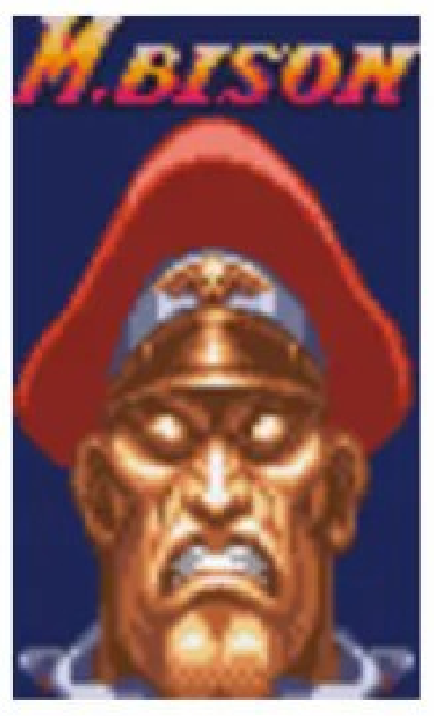
Spinning Pile Driver
↺ Ⓟ



APPEARANCE: Chun Li wears a qipao, a traditional Chinese dress, popular in the early 20th Century. Her hairstyle, 'ox-horns', is typical among Chinese children.

"I am the strongest woman in the world"

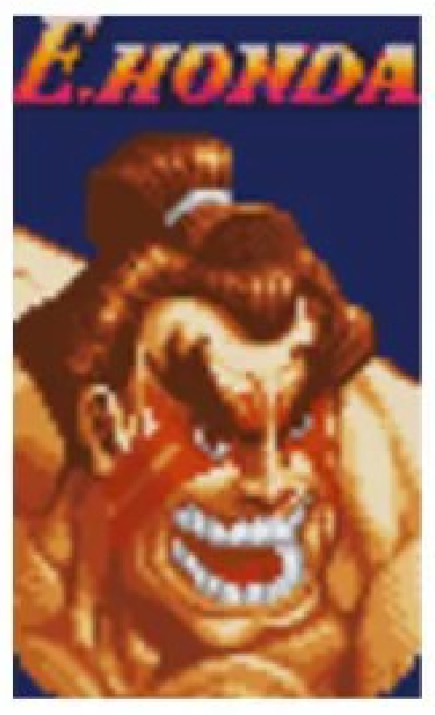
Spinning Bird Kick
↓ ↑ + Ⓚ



APPEARANCE: M.Bison's red uniform, cap and perfect posture give the air of a high-ranking military officer. His cap also carries the skull insignia of his crime syndicate, Shadaloo.

"Get lost! You can't compare with my powers"

Psycho Crusher
← → + Ⓟ



APPEARANCE: E.Honda is full of Japanese traditions. His hair, the Chonmage style, is a tradition carried on from the samurai and now popular in the sumo world. His face-paint style is known as Kumadori, a style prevalent in Kabuki actors and he wears a Yukata, a very popular outfit in Japan.

"Can't you do better than that?"

Sumo Head Butt
← → + Ⓟ

U.S.S.R.
CLAND
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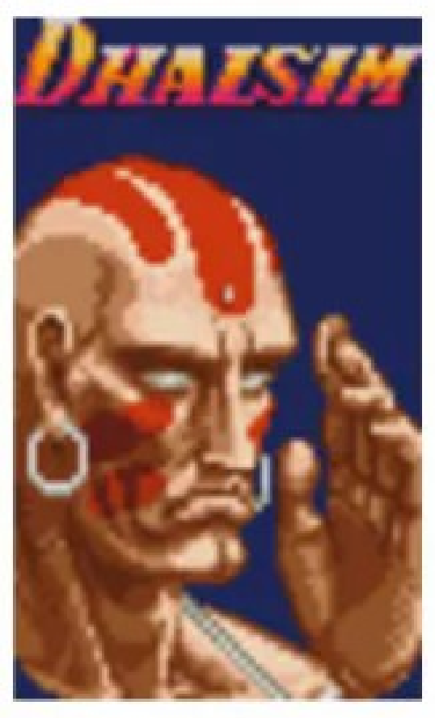
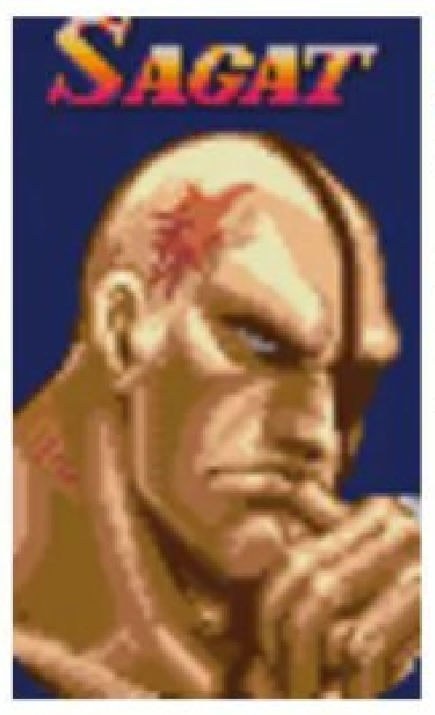


APPEARANCE: Dhalsim's necklace is assembled from the skulls of children that died in his village. Did he kill them himself? We wouldn't put it past him. The creep. Watch out for his bendy limbs.

"I will meditate and then destroy you"

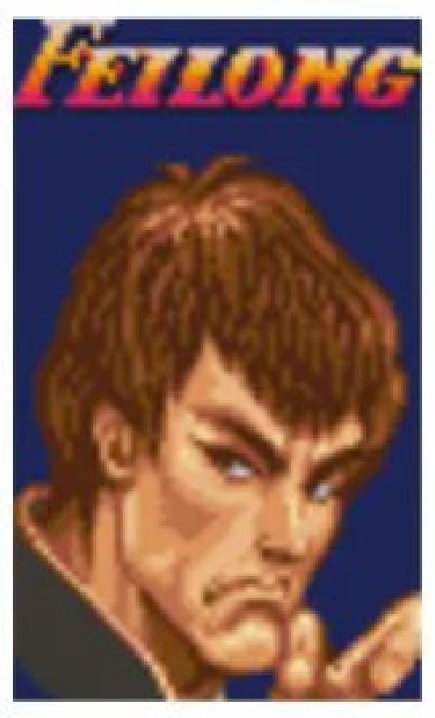
Yoga Flame
← ↙ ↓ ↘ → Ⓟ



APPEARANCE: Sagat's appearance is believed to derive from Thailand's Muay Thai master Reiba, as depicted in the manga *Karate Baka Ichidai.*

"You are not a warrior; you are a beginner"

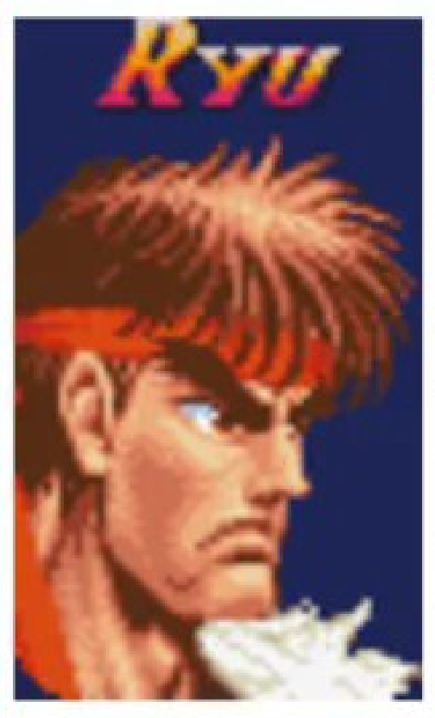
Tiger Knee
↓ ↘ → Ⓚ



APPEARANCE: Fei Long is a tribute to Bruce Lee. They're from the same city and look identical. Feilong translated also means 'flying dragon' and Lee's screen name was 'little dragon'.

"You have trained to be a great loser. Now you must learn to fight"

Shienkyaku
← ↓ ↙ Ⓚ



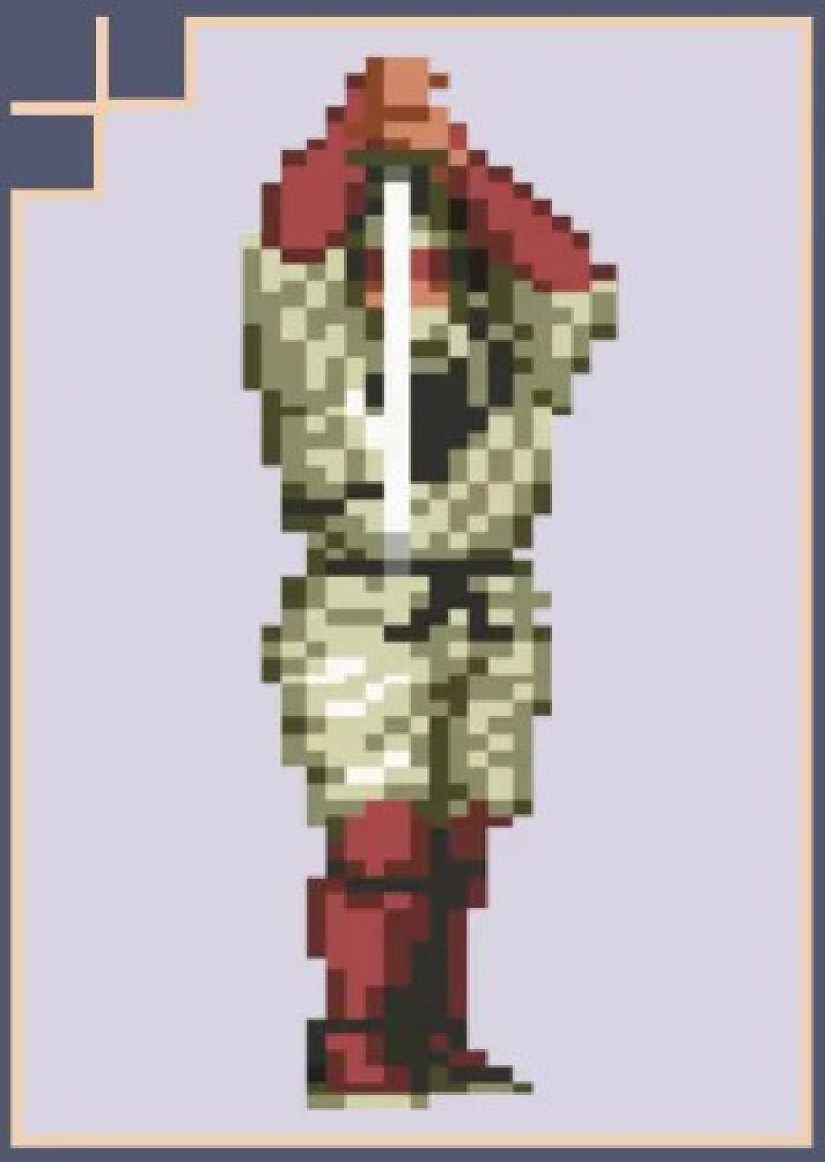
APPEARANCE: Ryu is one of the most copied archetypes in fighting games, his look is generic but effective.

"You must defeat my Dragon Punch to stand a chance"

Sho-Ryu-Ken
→ ↓ ↘ Ⓟ

JOE MUSASHI

A wealth of virtual ninjas have crept stealthily through the development gates, but few compare to Sega's original shadow warrior



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** JOE MUSASHI
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** SHINOBI
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SHINOBI 3D
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** NINJA MAGIC

***Shinobi* is the timely brainchild of Sega's Noriyoshi Ohba. Ohba, who later went on to work on the *Streets Of Rage* and *Wonder Boy* series, joined the company as a planner.** His 1987 arcade smash fused together two extraordinarily popular arcade genres of the time – the side-scrolling fighting game and the platform game – and capitalised on the martial arts fever that was hitting the United States at the time. In short it was huge.

Sharing an uncanny similarity to Namco's side-scrolling spy classic *Rolling Thunder*, and blending a similar dual-plane-hopping system into its action, *Shinobi*'s five stages of side-scrolling shuriken tossing opened the eyes of arcade goers everywhere to the thrilling code of the ninja. However, Joe Musashi isn't your typical Shinobi. Strutting, unmasked, through five despotic levels upheld with criminal and biomechanical gallows, Joe's approach to combat is not one of stealth but rather one of cocksure aggression.

While Joe's attacks are strong, he sadly isn't. Joe can only withstand one hit before dropping to his knees to make out with the floor. But to ease the difficulty, Joe can charge at his enemies, break their defences using a swift melee attack, and summon ninjitsu spells to smother the screen and cleanse them of enemies. These elements became the mainstays for the character in the games that followed. While *Shinobi* is a relatively simple arcade game to get a handle on, Joe's virtual exploits are widely considered among the most challenging games you can come by.

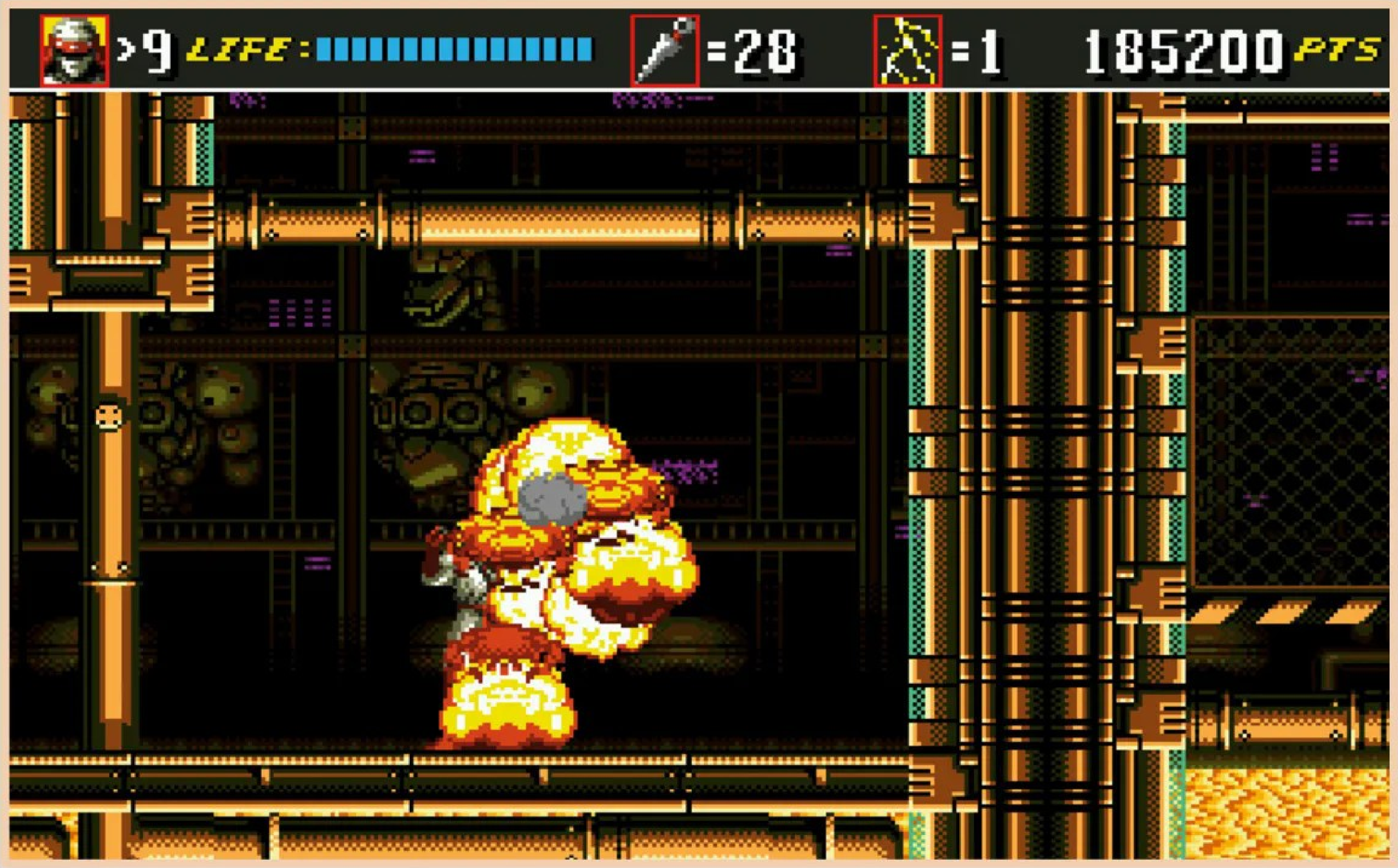
In the first *Shinobi* game, Joe Musashi rescues children, in pink pyjamas, and topples a crime syndicate known as Zeed and its powerful leaders, the Ring of Five. With his mission completed and the syndicate defeated, Joe hands the Shinobi reins down to his son Hayate and his snowy white canine Yamato, for an arcade spin-off called *Shadow Dancer*, in which the pair tackle an all-new criminal organisation. But the Zeed aren't finished with Joe. Not by any stretch of the imagination.

Newly reformed, under the fresh moniker Neo Zeed, the crime lords draw Joe out of retirement by butchering his Oboro clansmen and kidnapping his bride-to-be, Naoko. But Joe's power and taste in clothes has heightened dramatically since 1987. In *The Revenge Of Shinobi* our hero ditches his dour grey-and-yellow suit for a lustrous-looking white-and-crimson outfit. He is also given a life bar and can summon four potent spell attacks based on the power of thunder, fire, floating, and human hand-grenade: Ikazuchi, Fushin, Kariu, and Mijin, respectively.

With no children to rescue, Joe found himself in need of a more demanding challenge, and so Sega introduced multi-scrolling stages replete with switches, lifts, and conveyor belts. Thankfully, to assist him in negotiating his surroundings, Joe is gifted with the ability to execute a pretty nifty double-jump that allows him to reach higher platforms and douse his enemies in a barrage of throwing stars. In the true finale of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, Joe manages to save his love interest, Noako, but sadly there's little time for romance. The Zeed rise to power once more, leaving one final *Shinobi* mission for Joe.

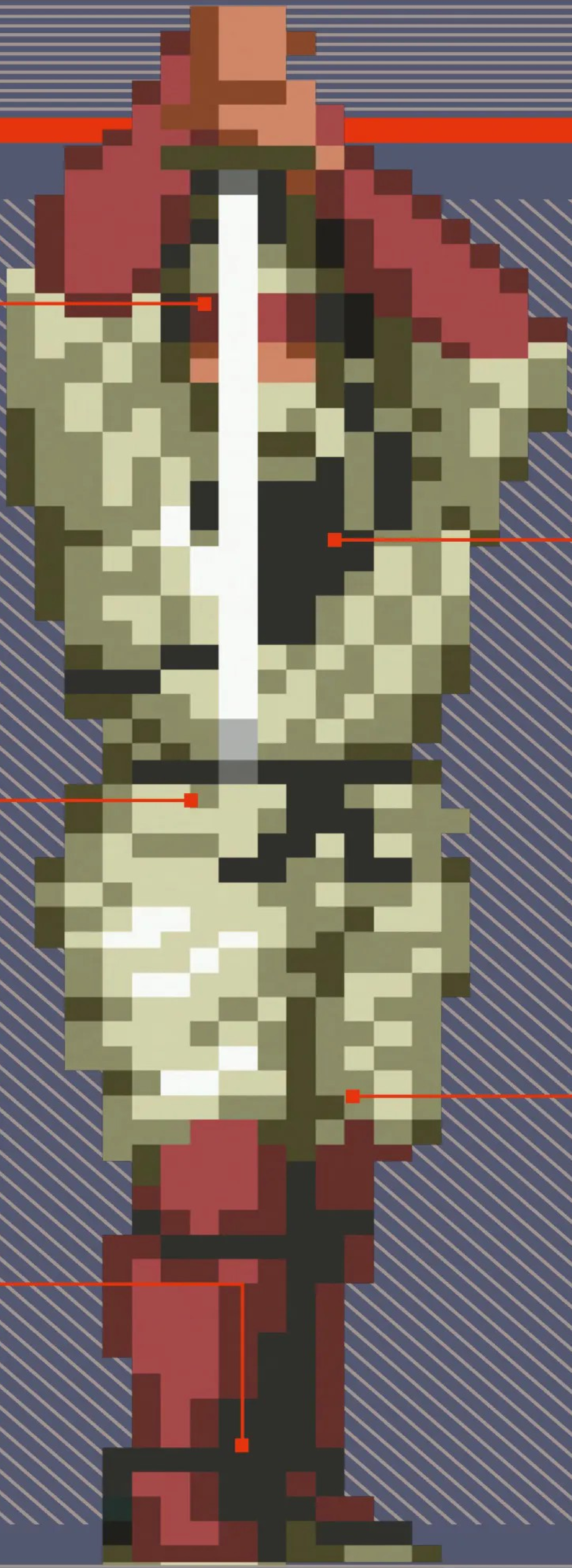
Considered the pinnacle of the series, in *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master* Joe retains his sleek look and ninjitsu spells from the previous incarnation, but this time his move repertoire has been dramatically refined. Joe can now pull off such actions as a triple-jump, a dash-attack, and he can even perform a devastating flying kick. While many argue that the action in previous *Shinobi* games felt a little subdued, *Shinobi III* gallops ahead at a blistering pace. With a greater emphasis on fighting and negotiating tricky platform sections, many of the levels force fans to utilise all of Joe's moves – and even his ninjitsu spells – to reach the exit. It proved a fantastic swansong for Joe Musashi.

Although he does appear as an unlockable character in the PlayStation 2 *Shinobi* and *Shinobi 3D* on 3DS, Joe only actually plays the protagonist in three *Shinobi* games, and the earlier missions rank as the most memorable and challenging in the canon. While the evil Zeed appear to have been thwarted, the exploits of the legendary Shinobi, Joe Musashi, still live on.



■ Joe's spectacular Mijin spell causes him to spontaneously combust on the spot.

■ Seeing the good ending to *The Revenge Of Shinobi* is one of the most arduous Mega Drive challenges.



HEAD

Joe's original character design saw him dressed in a grey-and-yellow suit and without a mask for concealment. This was probably done deliberately to expose Joe's subtle Western look. His design is clearly a mixture of Western and Japanese influences and his juxtaposing name further supports this thinking. In the later games Joe's face became increasingly concealed – in *Shinobi III* no facial features are apparent on the main sprite.

BODY

Thanks to the popularity of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, Joe's red and-white suit quickly became iconic. Its clean style was later adopted for Sega's arcade spin off, *Shadow Dancer*, and would remain the look for Joe up until his last Mega Drive appearance.

POCKETS

Shurikens, or throwing stars as they were known over here, have always been used for Joe's main long-range attack. In the first game he's granted an infinite amount to fire at his enemies, but in latter games he was forced to use them more sparingly and replenish them by smashing wooden crates that were scattered around the levels.

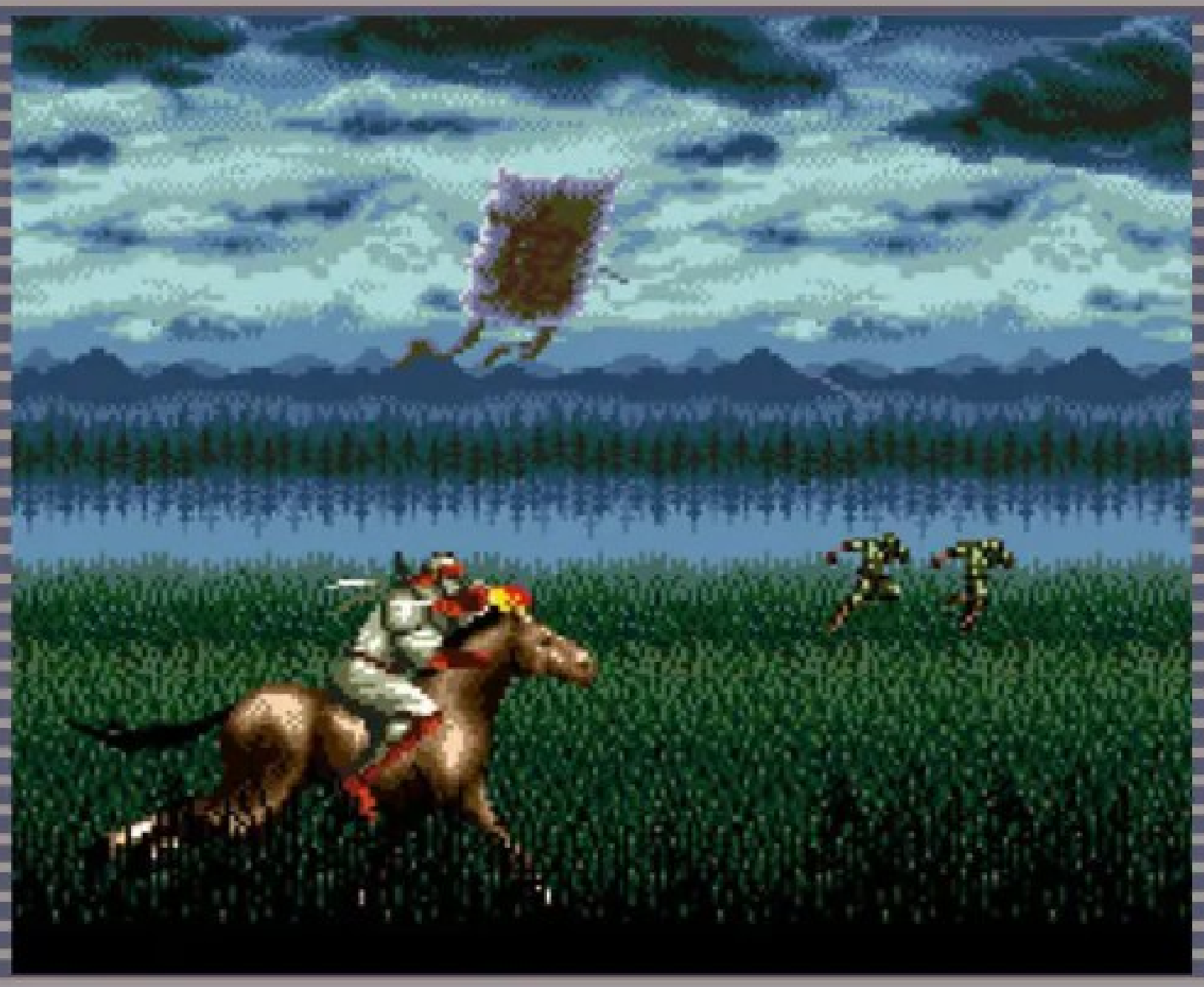
KNEE PADS

Why are ninjas so obsessed with knee pads? Perhaps with all that jumping around they're prone to tearing cartilage. Joe's outfit is enforced with armlets and knee-high boots to offer him protection while at the same not restricting his movements.

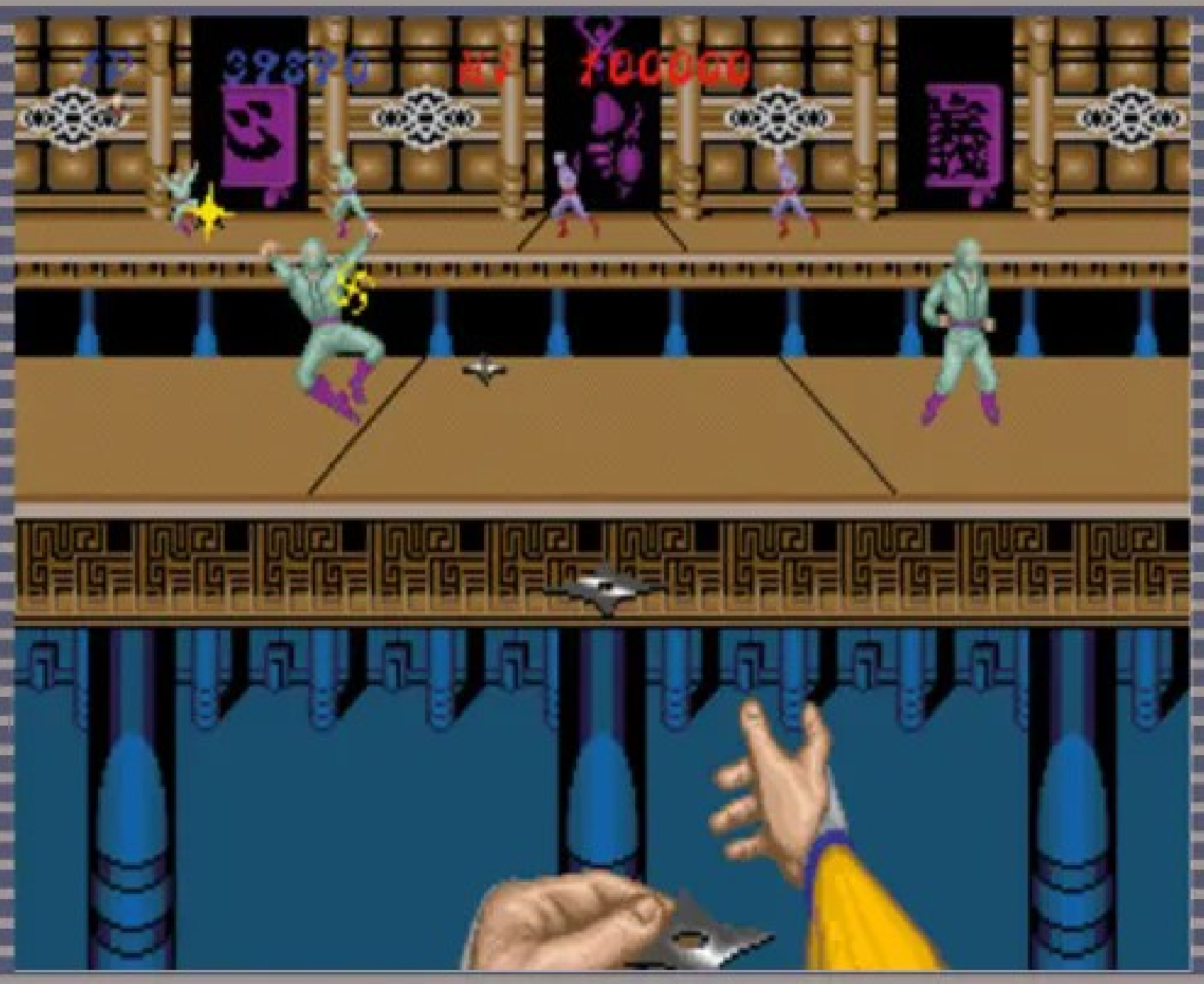
FEET

Any ninja worth his salt must rely on stealth and shadow creeping to slay his enemies, but not Joe; he walks brashly through each game choosing to ignore the code of the ninja.

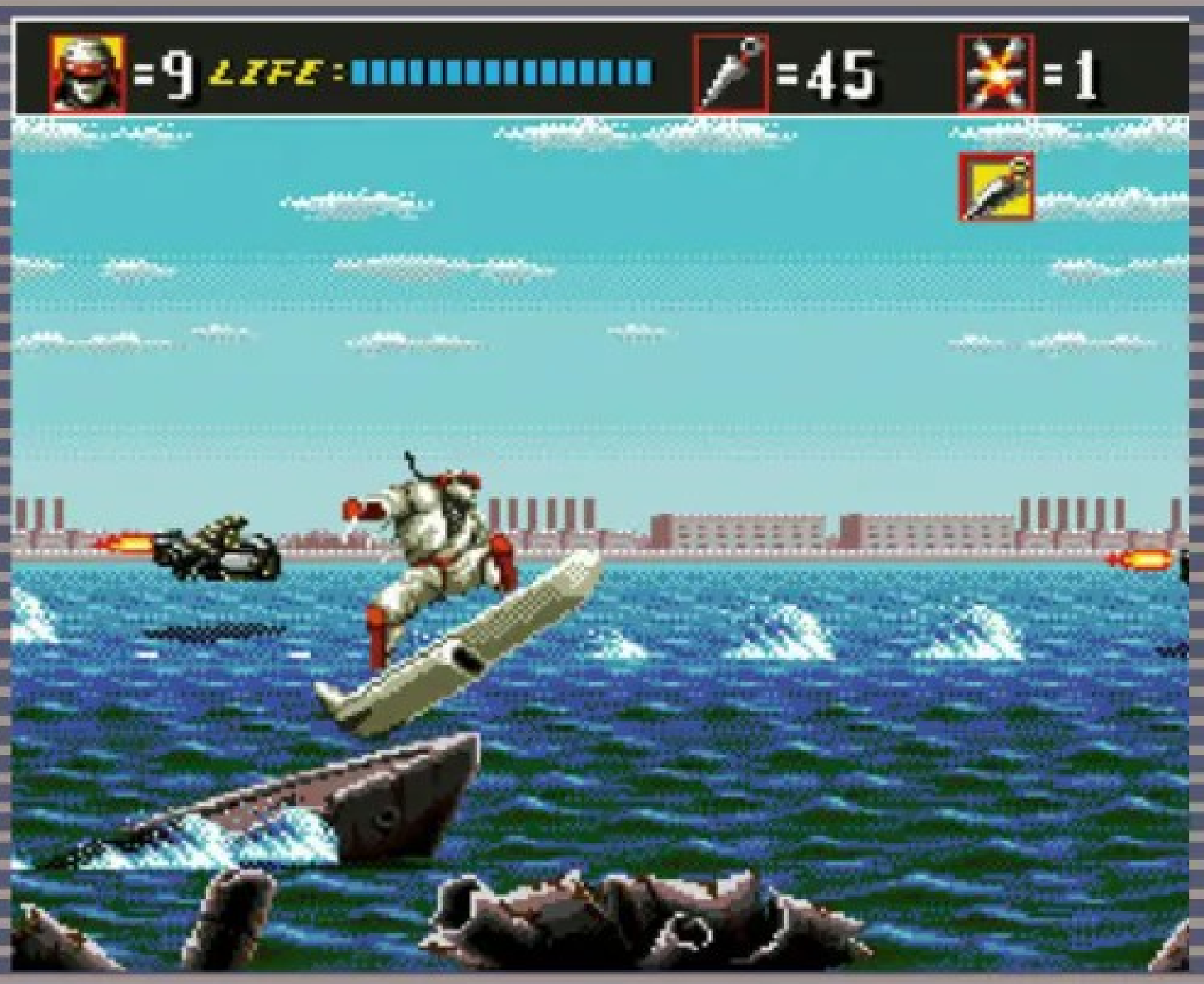
> MAGIC MOMENTS



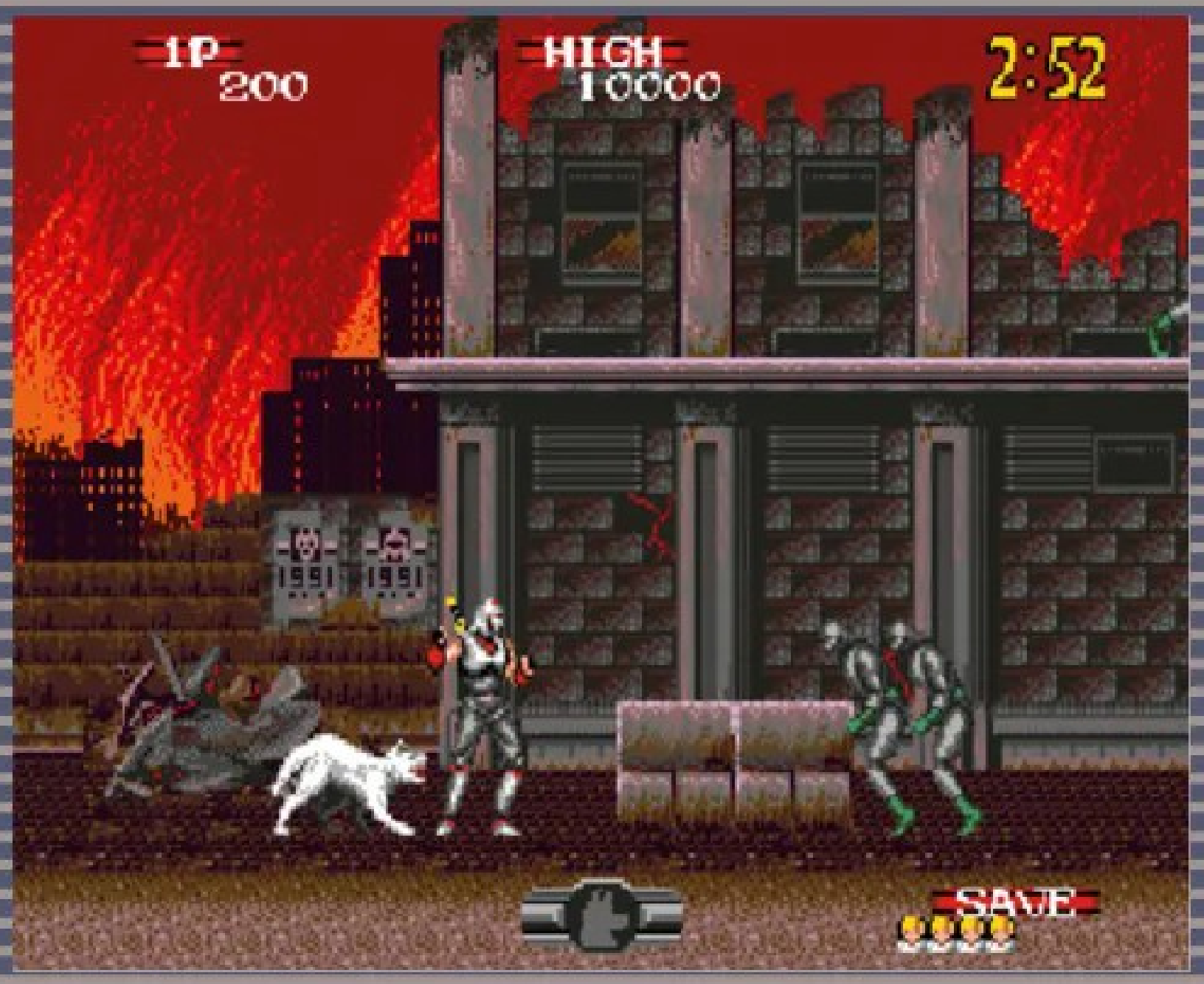
■ *Shinobi III*'s second stage features Joe on a horse, taking out ninjas living in stunt kites.



■ In *Shinobi* you get the chance to win an extra life for a perfect score at Ninja Space Invaders.



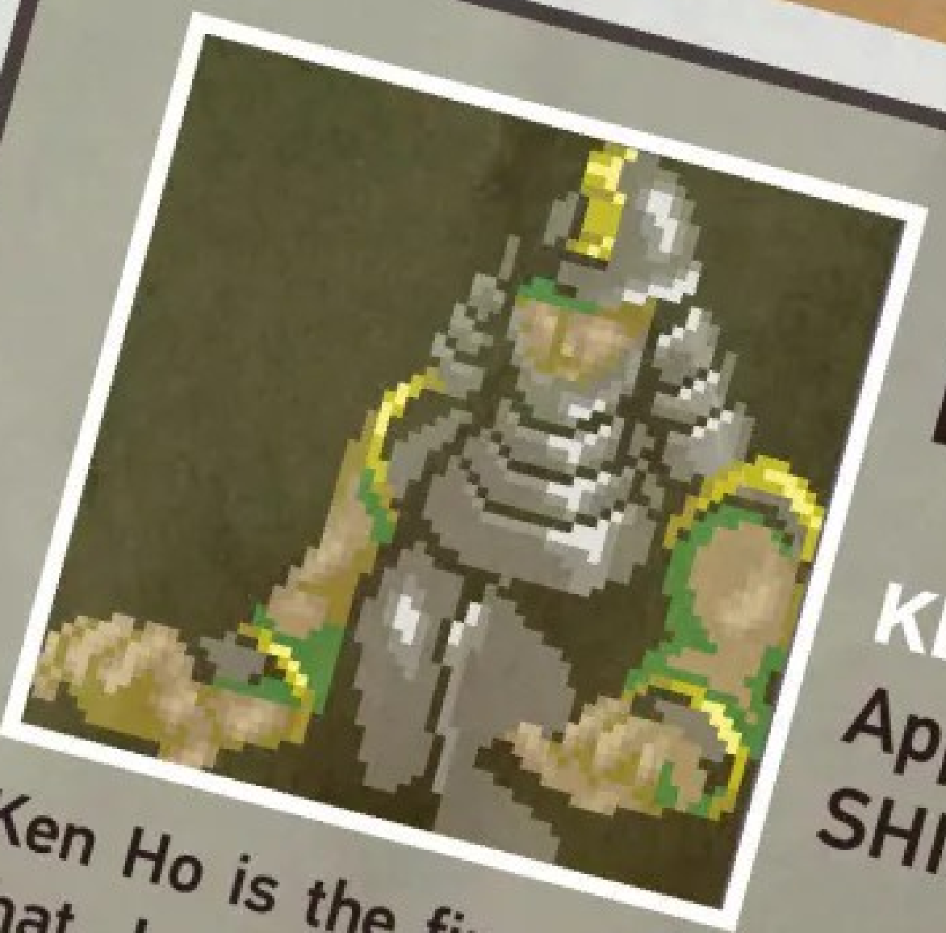
■ Joe dons a motorised surfboard in a level that smacks of *Contra*.



■ The Mega Drive port of *Shadow Dancer* features different levels to the arcade game.

THE MUSASHI FILES

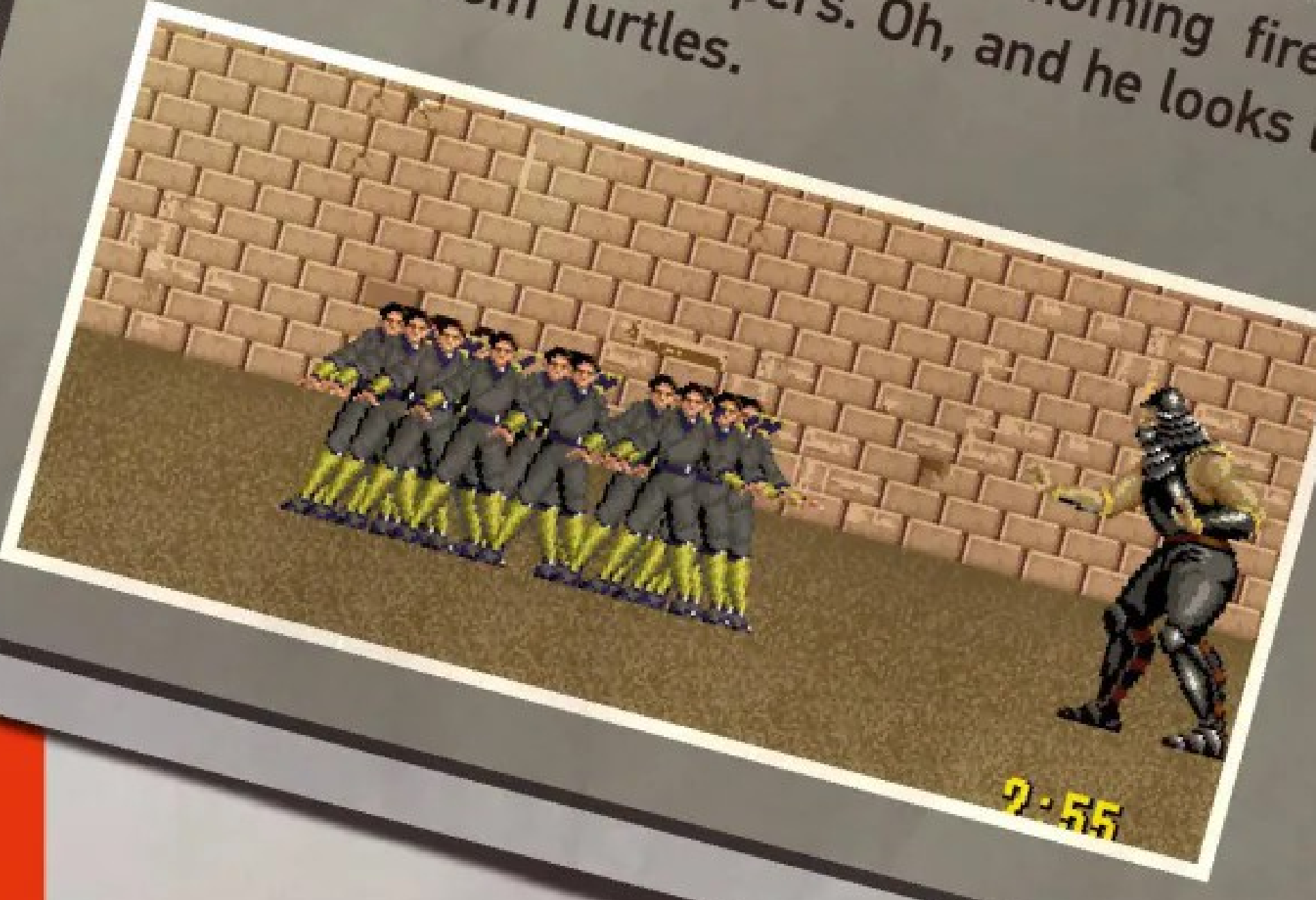
The dramatic and outrageous boss fights play as much a part of the Shinobi series as the shuriken tossing and ninjitsu. Joe had to defeat a total of 20 Neo Zeed bosses during his tour of Shinobi duty. Join games™ as we delve into the Musashi Files, and look back at Joe's most memorable adversaries

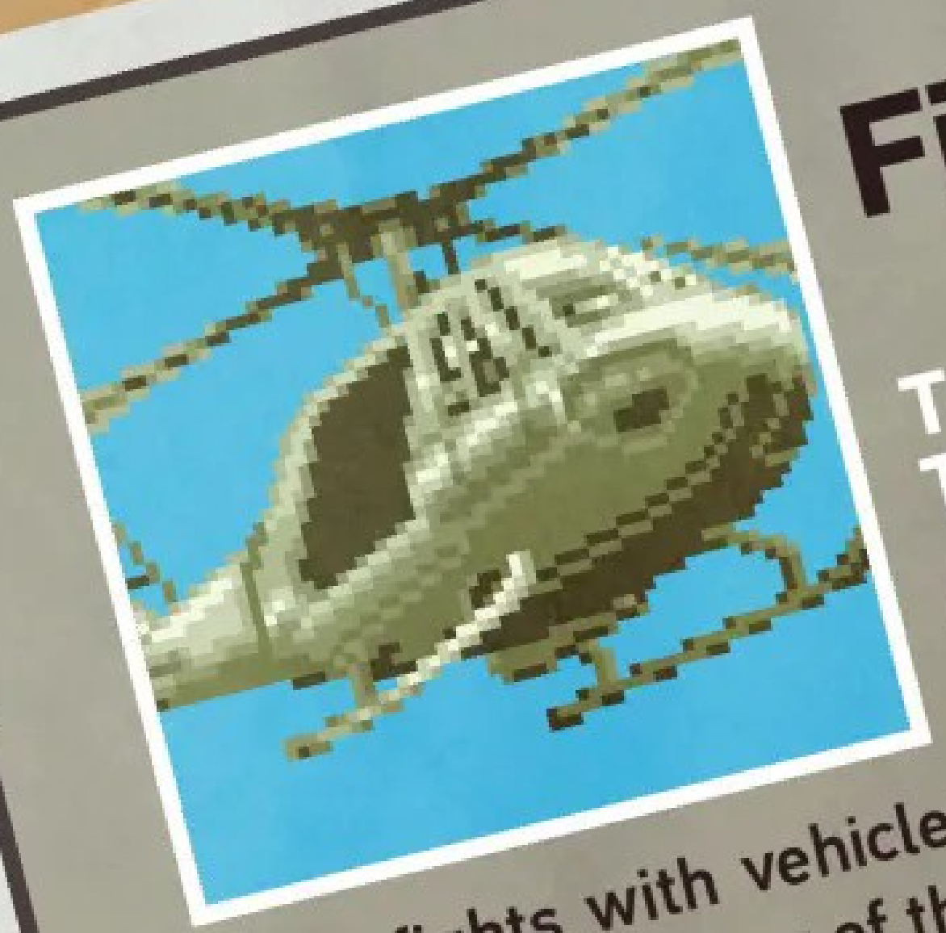


File No. 1

KEN HO
Appearance:
SHINOBI

Ken Ho is the first member of the Ring of Five that Joe must tackle. He strikes a menacing pose, and his size overshadows our hero. Peculiarly, most of the bosses in *Shinobi* taunt Joe by waiting for him at the end of each act and legging it before he can get an attack in. But Ken Ho's taunts are particularly annoying because he launches his unpredictable homing fireball on Joe before he scarpers. Oh, and he looks like Shredder from Turtles.

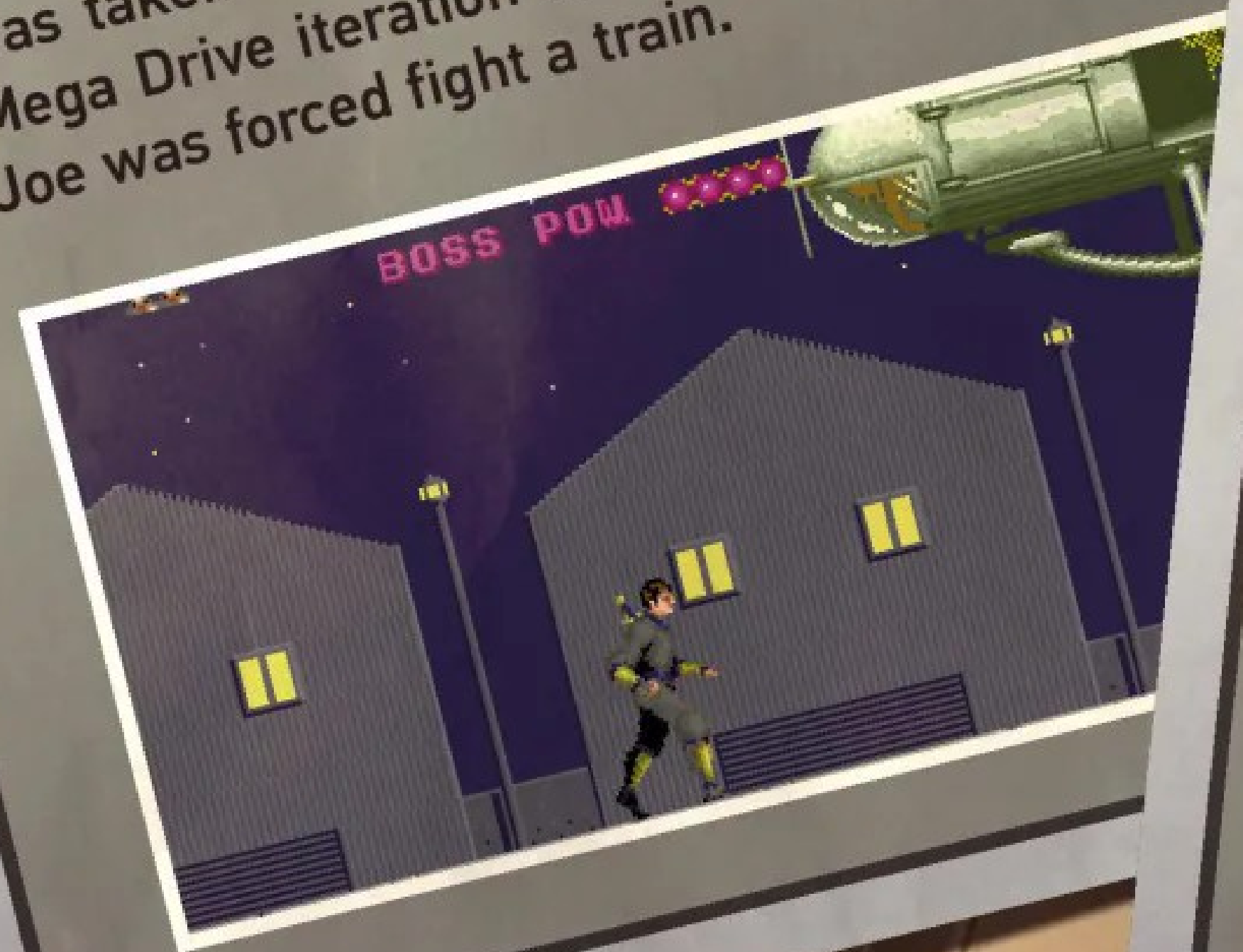


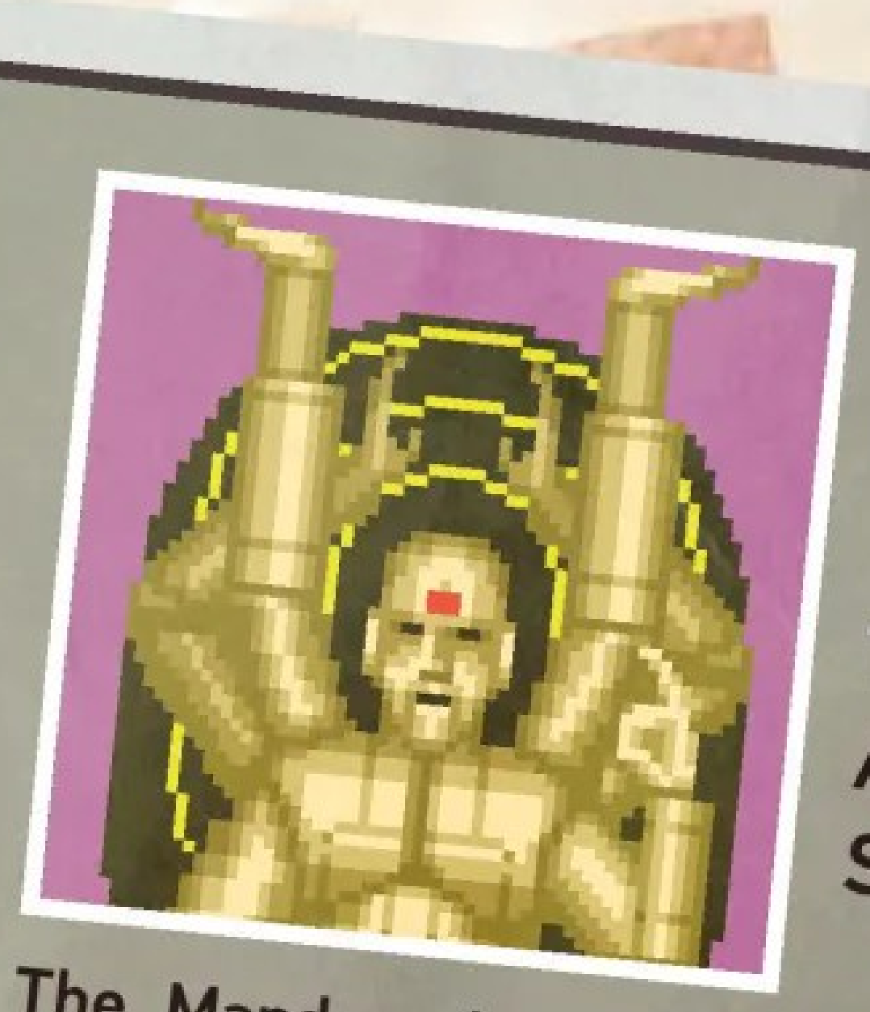


File No. 2

THE BLACK TURTLE
Appearance:
SHINOBI

Joe's fights with vehicles and machines later became a mainstay of the series, so The Black Turtle boss in *Shinobi* is notable because it's the first time that we see Joe Musashi face-off against an enemy not made of flesh and bone. But his strange man-versus-machine concept was taken to all-new ridiculous levels in the Mega Drive iteration of *Shadow Dancer* when Joe was forced fight a train.

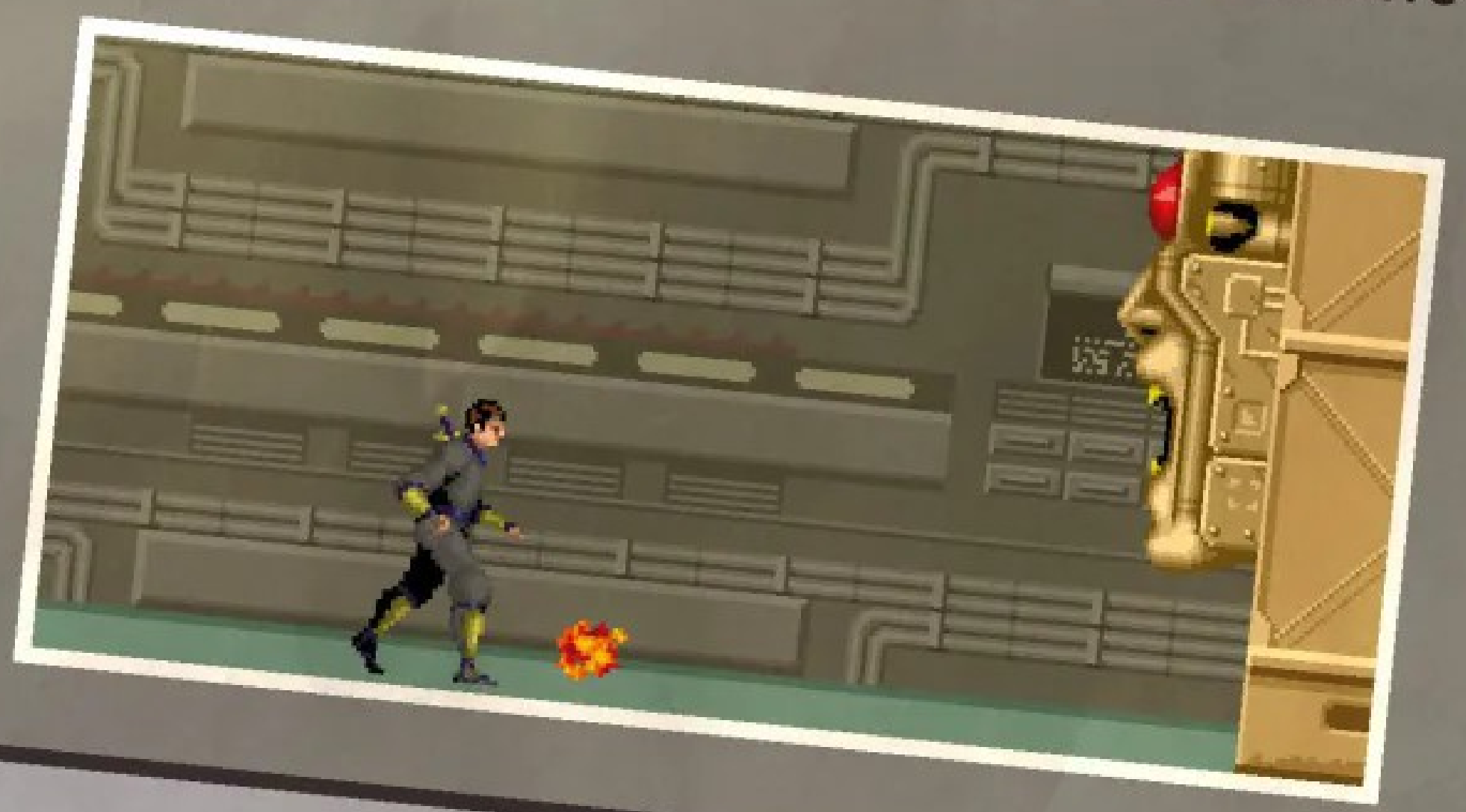


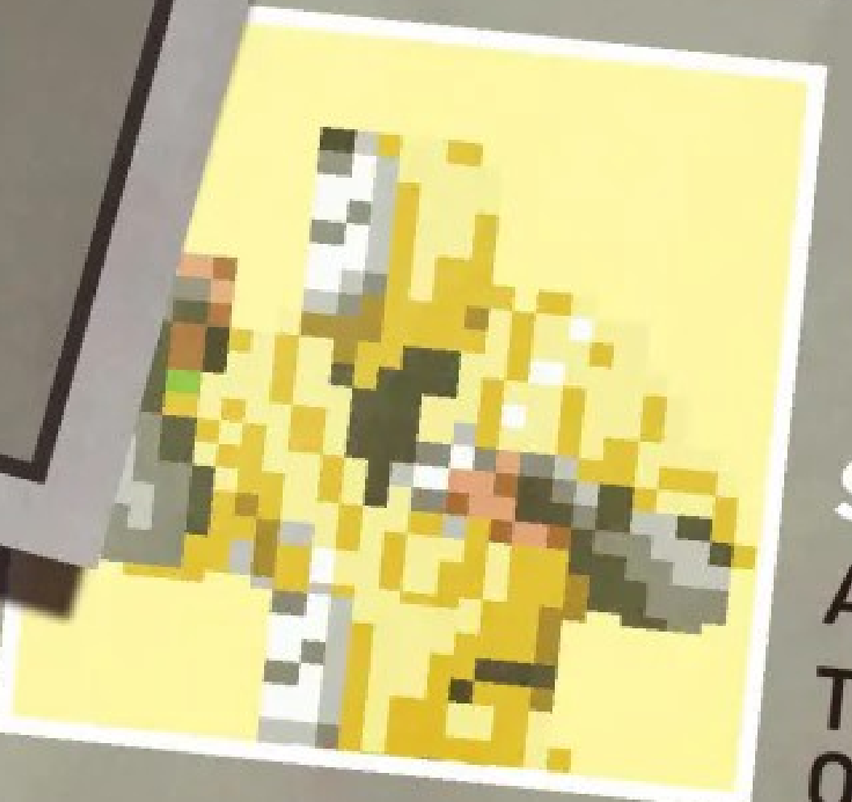


File No. 3

THE MANDARA
Appearance:
SHINOBI

The Mandara boss takes the form of a giant wall of C3POs. The Mandara moves quickly toward Joe, forcing him perilously closer to a deadly electrified barrier at the far left of the screen. Quick-fire shuriken lobbing and a timely ninjitsu spell will generally see our hero avoid a painful frazzling, but the Mandara exposes a cunning ace up its sleeve forcing Joe to fight a fireball-spewing face with a potentially offensive weak spot.

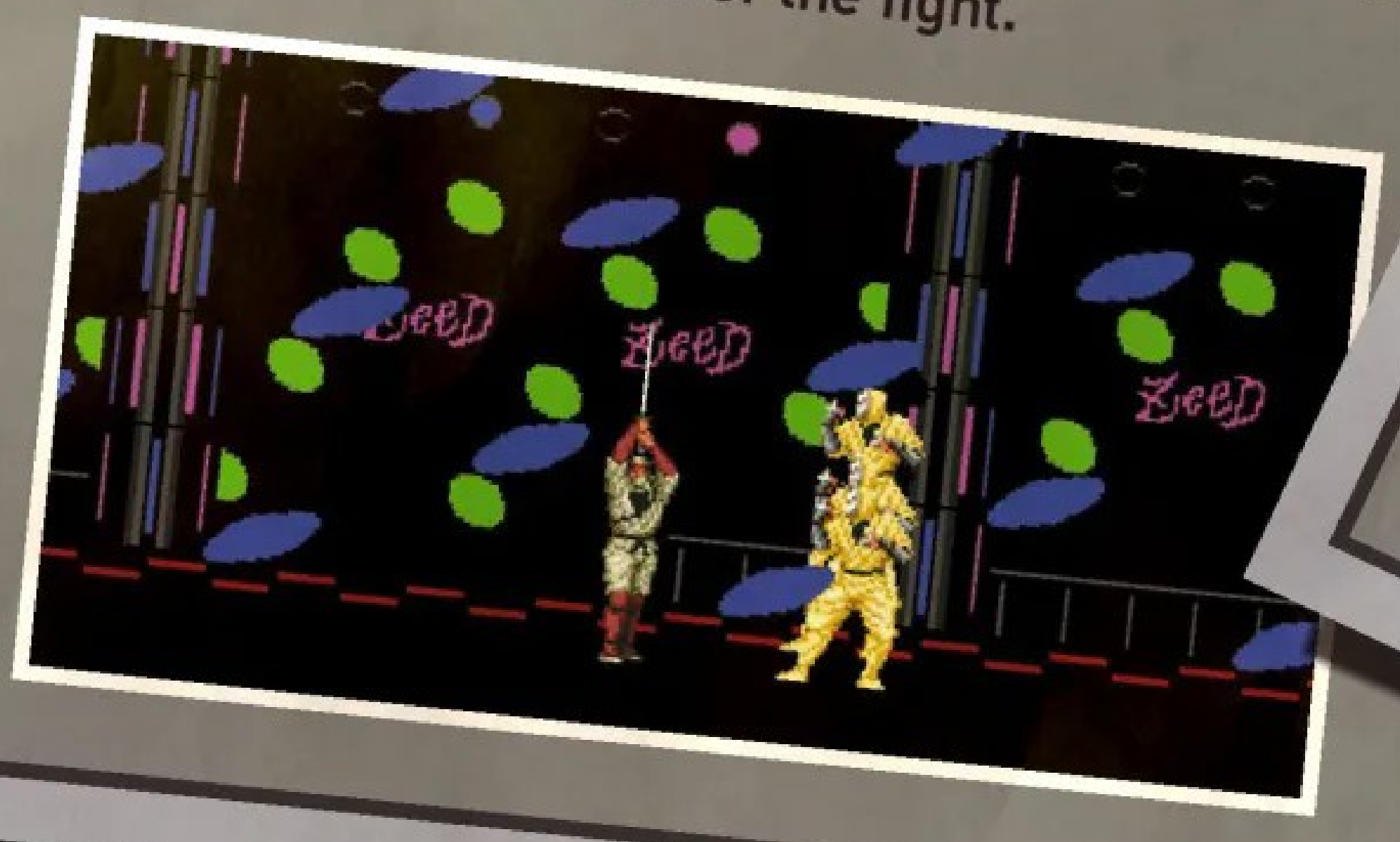


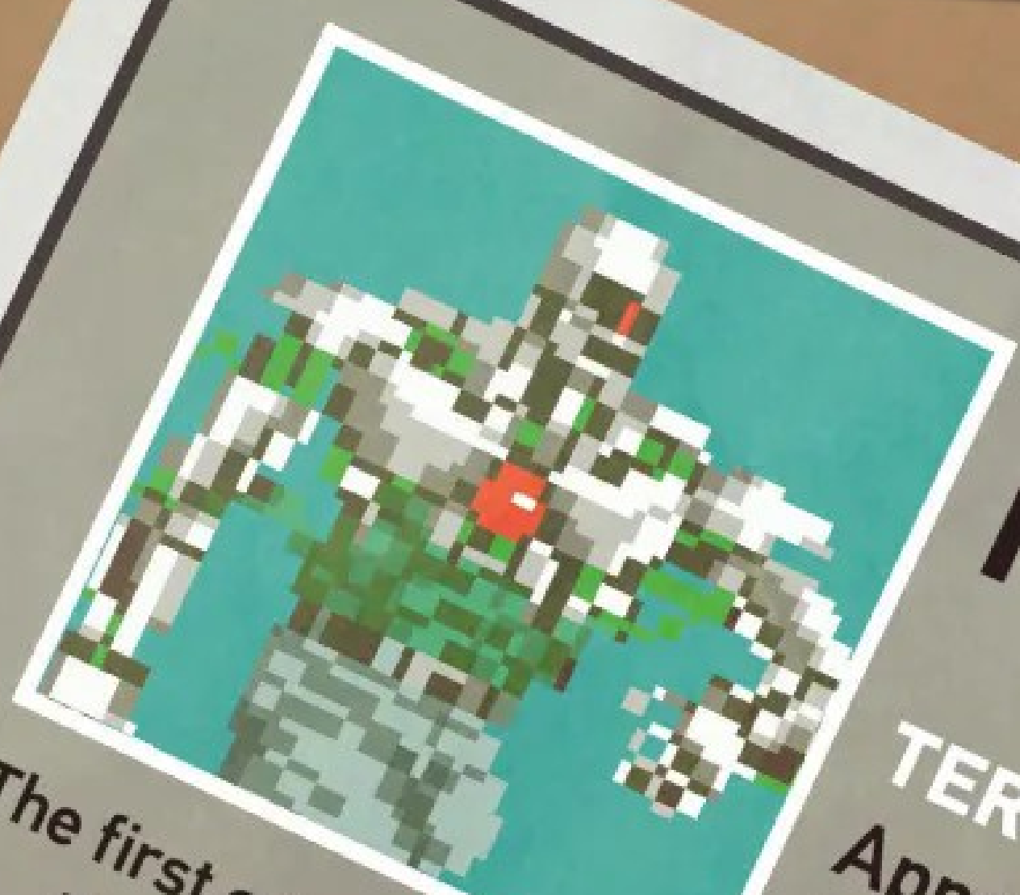


File No. 4

SHADOW NINJA
Appearance:
THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

It wouldn't be a Sega Mega Drive game if it didn't have a psychedelic nightclub stage, and *The Revenge Of Shinobi* doesn't disappoint thanks to the appearance of The Shadow Ninja. Mimicking Joe's Kariu ninjitsu, The Shadow Ninja uses his agility to bounce around the dance floor and generate several doppelgangers of himself. The fight is memorable because Joe is forced to individually pick off each of the clones before he could get to real meat of the fight.

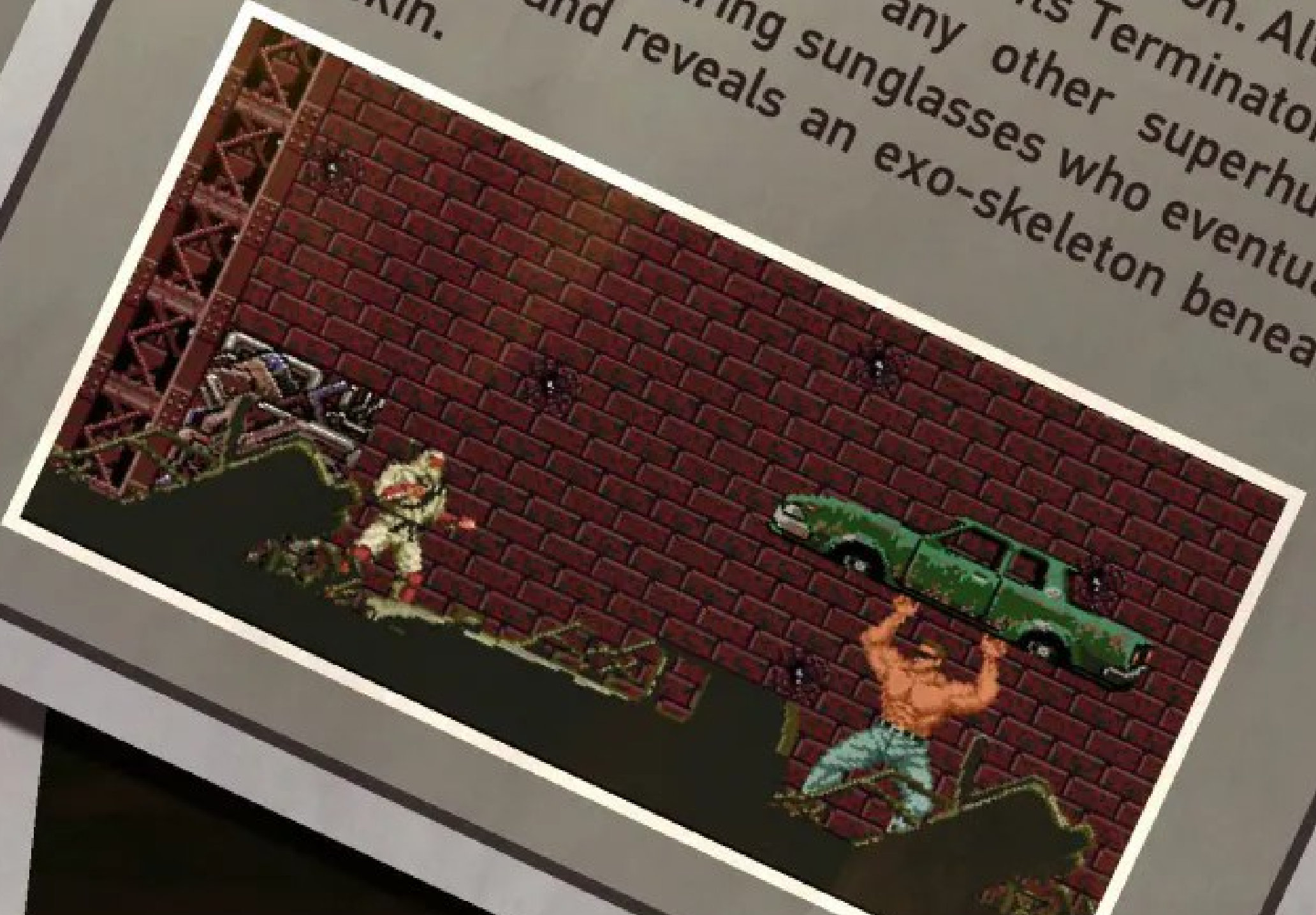


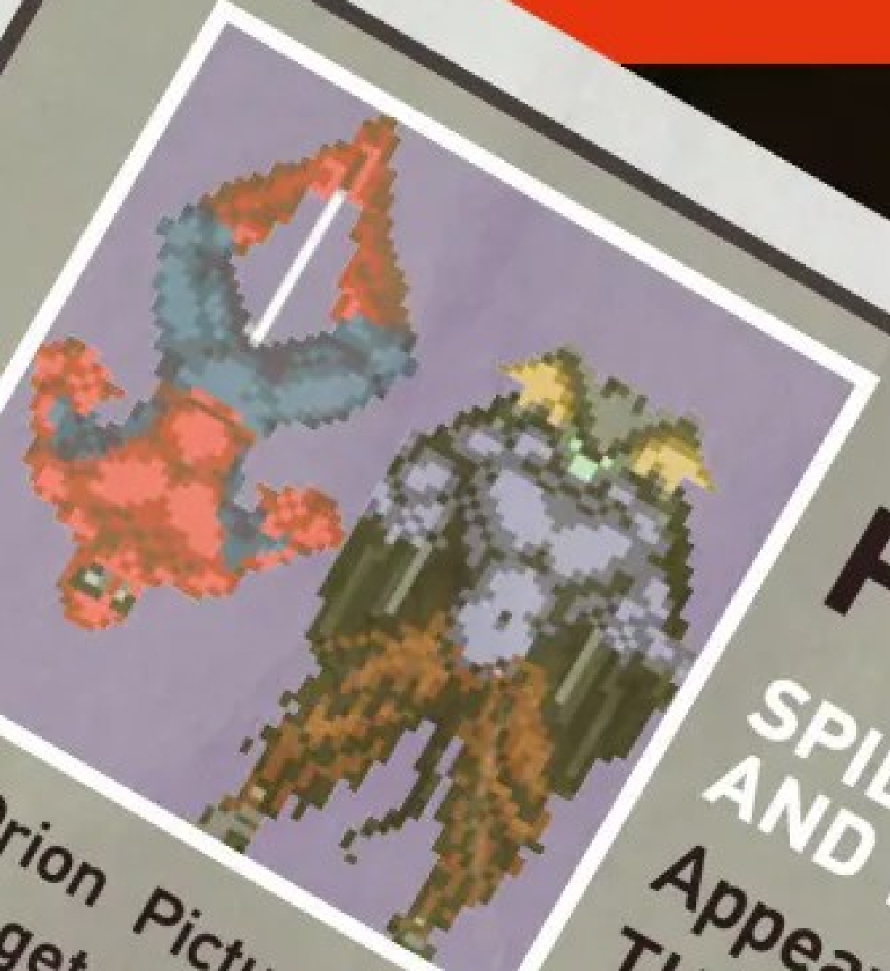


File No. 5

TERMINATOR
Appearance:
THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

The first celebrity boss fight that Joe encounters is this muscle-laden car-thrower with a penchant for resembling Californian governors. Yes, this licence-infringing boss candidly borrows so much from T800 you can't quite believe how Sega got away with it without making an enemy of James Cameron. Although, to be fair, Sega could argue its Terminator boss could conceivably be any other superhuman male model wearing sunglasses who eventually blows up and reveals an exo-skeleton beneath its skin.



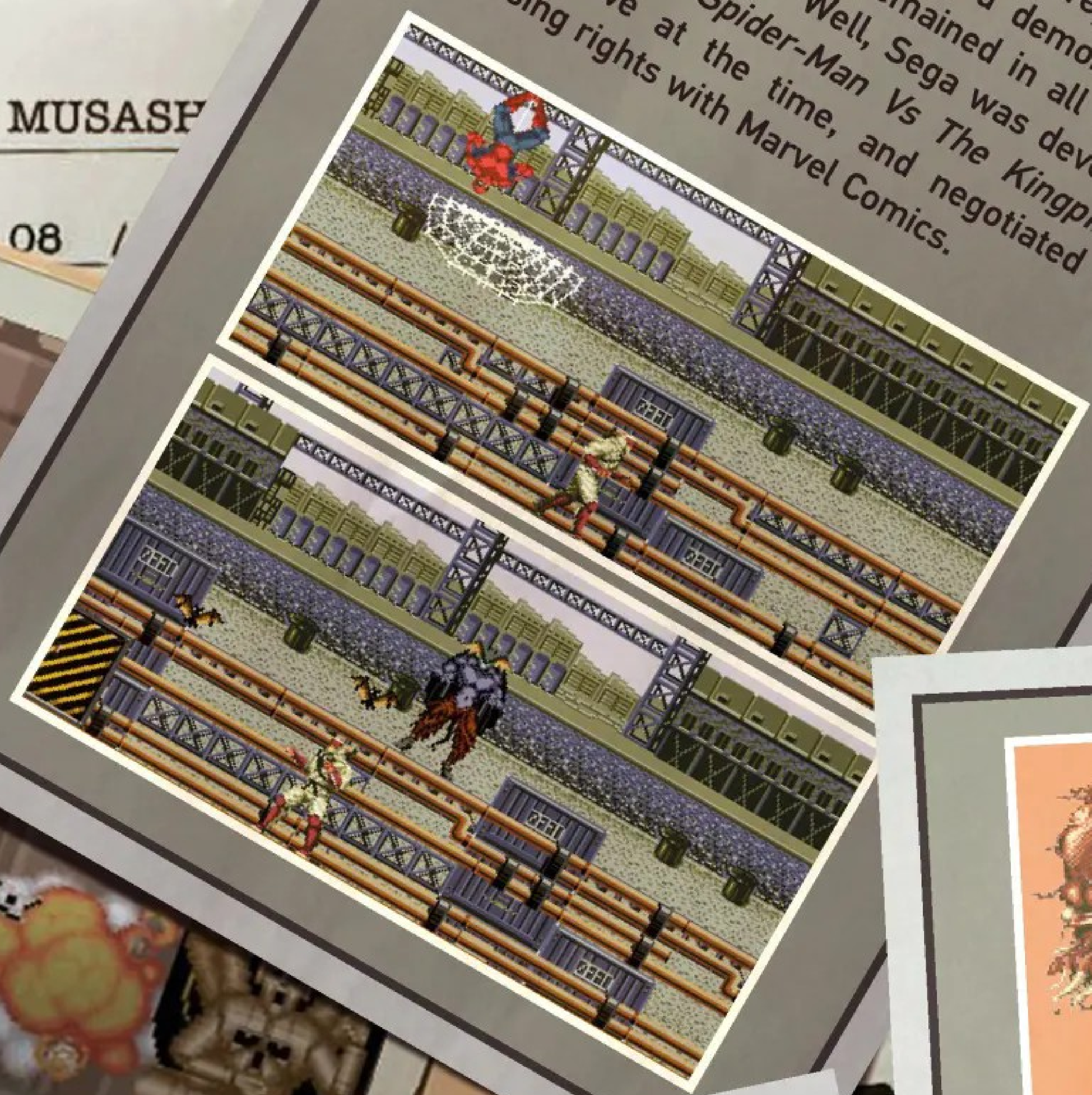


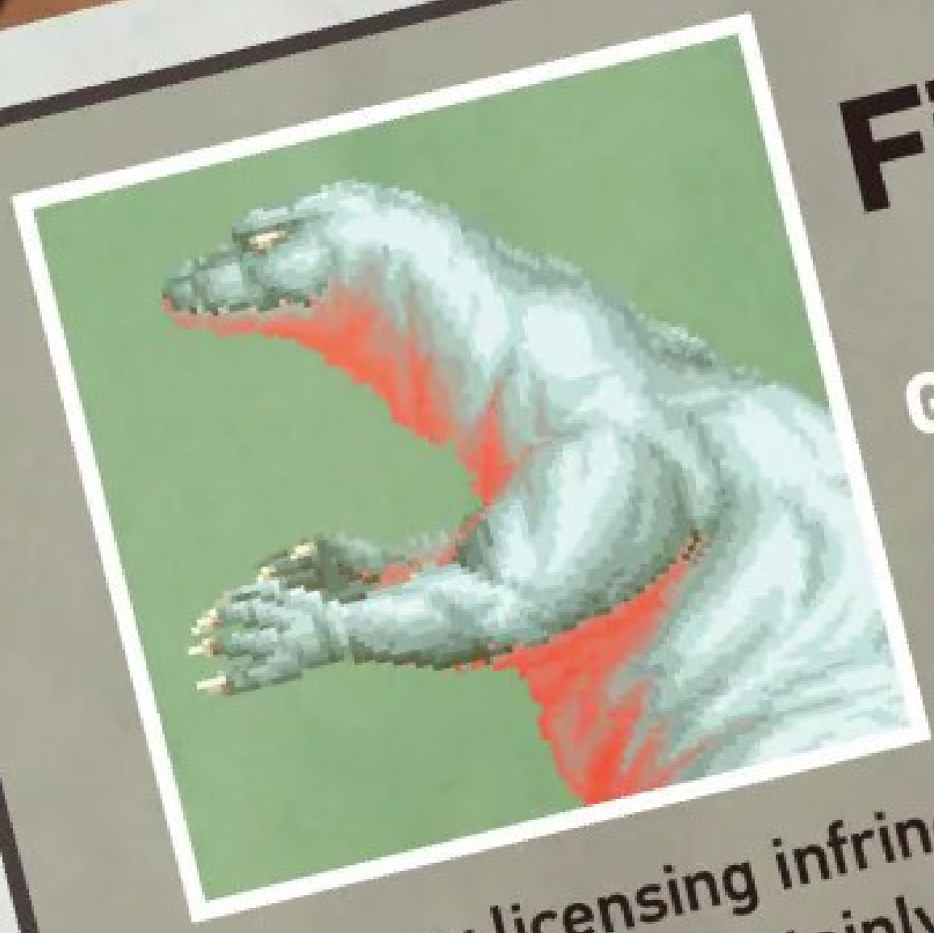
File No. 6

SPIDER-MAN AND BATMAN

Appearance: THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

First Orion Pictures and then Marvel and DC comics get unwittingly mixed up in some Musashi-mashing action. The first version of *The Revenge Of Shinobi* – version 1.00, distinguishable by its lack of copyright notice on the start-up screen – sees Joe trying to swat an unfriendly neighbourhood Spider-Man. But that's not all, after Joe eventually sent Spider-Man packing, Batman – void of chest motif and donning a pair semi-organic-looking batwings – would flap down and continue the fight. When DC caught wind of this it immediately ordered Sega to remove the Caped Crusader from its game, and the Dark Knight was quickly replaced with a boring, nondescript winged demon instead. Spider-Man, however, remained in all versions of the game. How? Well, Sega was developing *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs The Kingpin* for Mega Drive at the time, and negotiated the licensing rights with Marvel Comics.



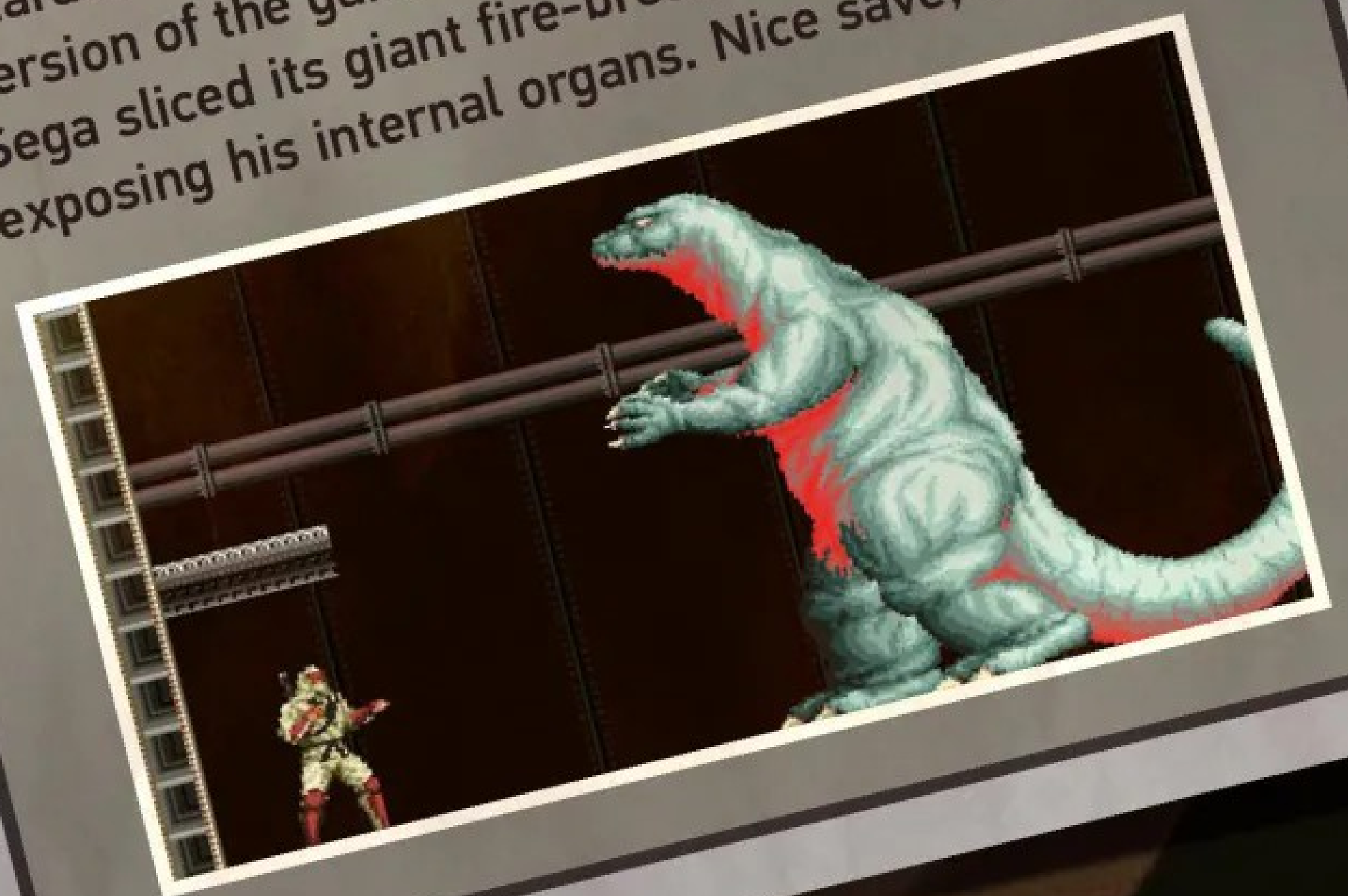


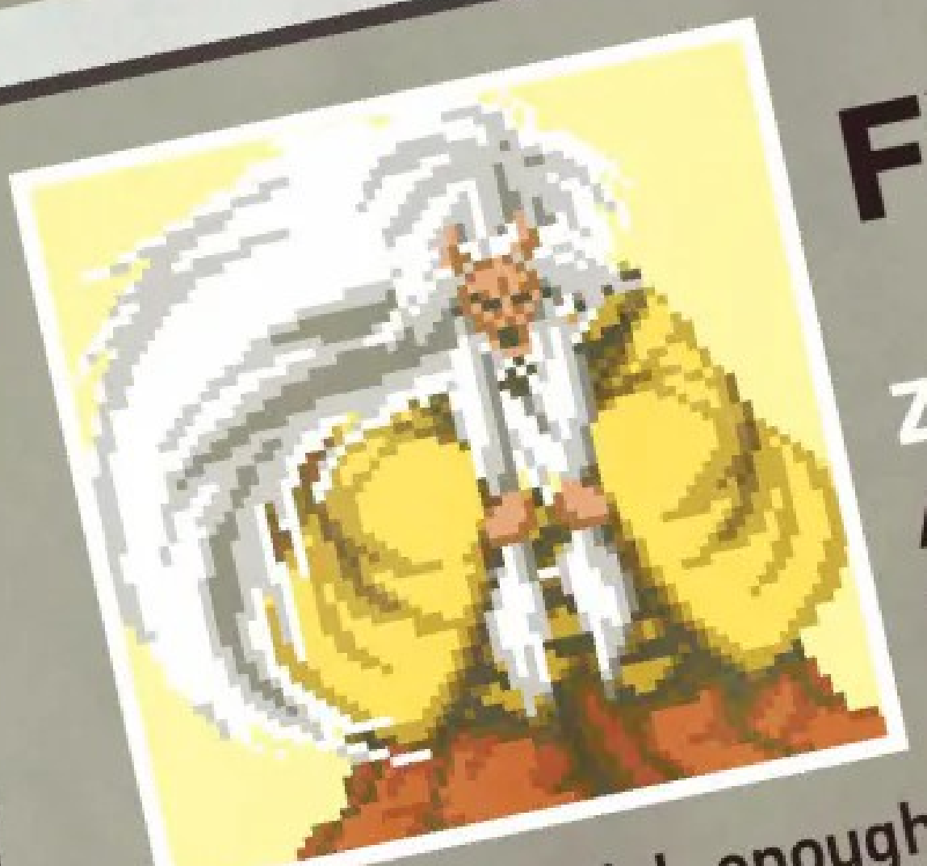
File No. 7

GODZILLA

Appearance: THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

They say licensing infringement comes in threes and this can certainly be the case for *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. The penultimate boss in the game was clearly another cheeky nod to a pop culture icon – this time from Musashi's neck of the woods. In the first and second iteration of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, Joe must take out Tokyo's biggest export: Godzilla. Not surprisingly, when Godzilla's creator, Toho, caught wind of its lizard moonlighting, Sega was ordered to omit the character and was forced to release another version of the game. The issue was solved when Sega sliced its giant fire-breathing lizard in half, exposing his internal organs. Nice save, chaps.



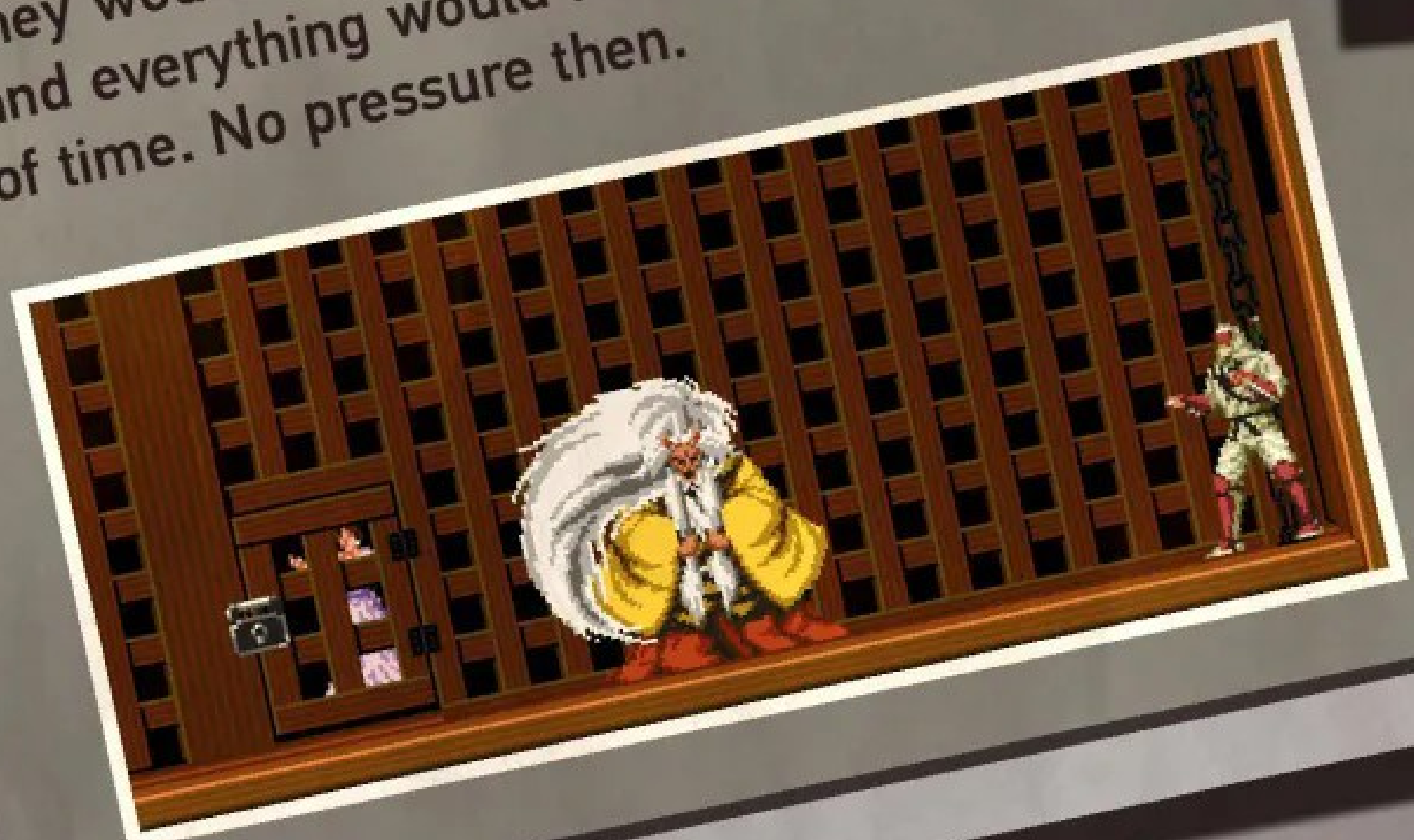


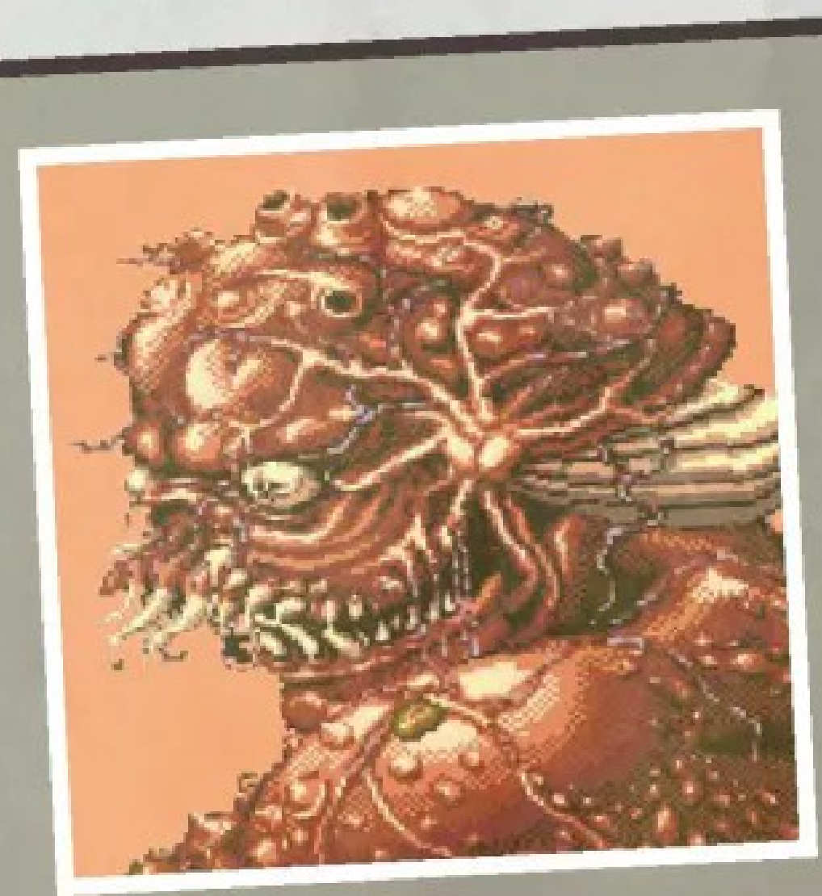
File No. 8

ZEED

Appearance: THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

If you're skilful enough to reach the end of *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, Joe will finally get to confront Zeed himself who seems to take the peculiar form of a poisonous troll doll. It's one of Joe's most epic and memorable boss fights as it has two different outcomes. Perched inside a wooden cage above Zeed is Joe's kidnapped girl, Noako, and if Joe isn't quick to finish the fight, she'll die. Of course, if that happens then everything up to that point has been in vain… except for the fact that Joe would have finally toppled the Zeed… again… even though later they would return… so yes, fail to save the girl and everything would have been an utter waste of time. No pressure then.



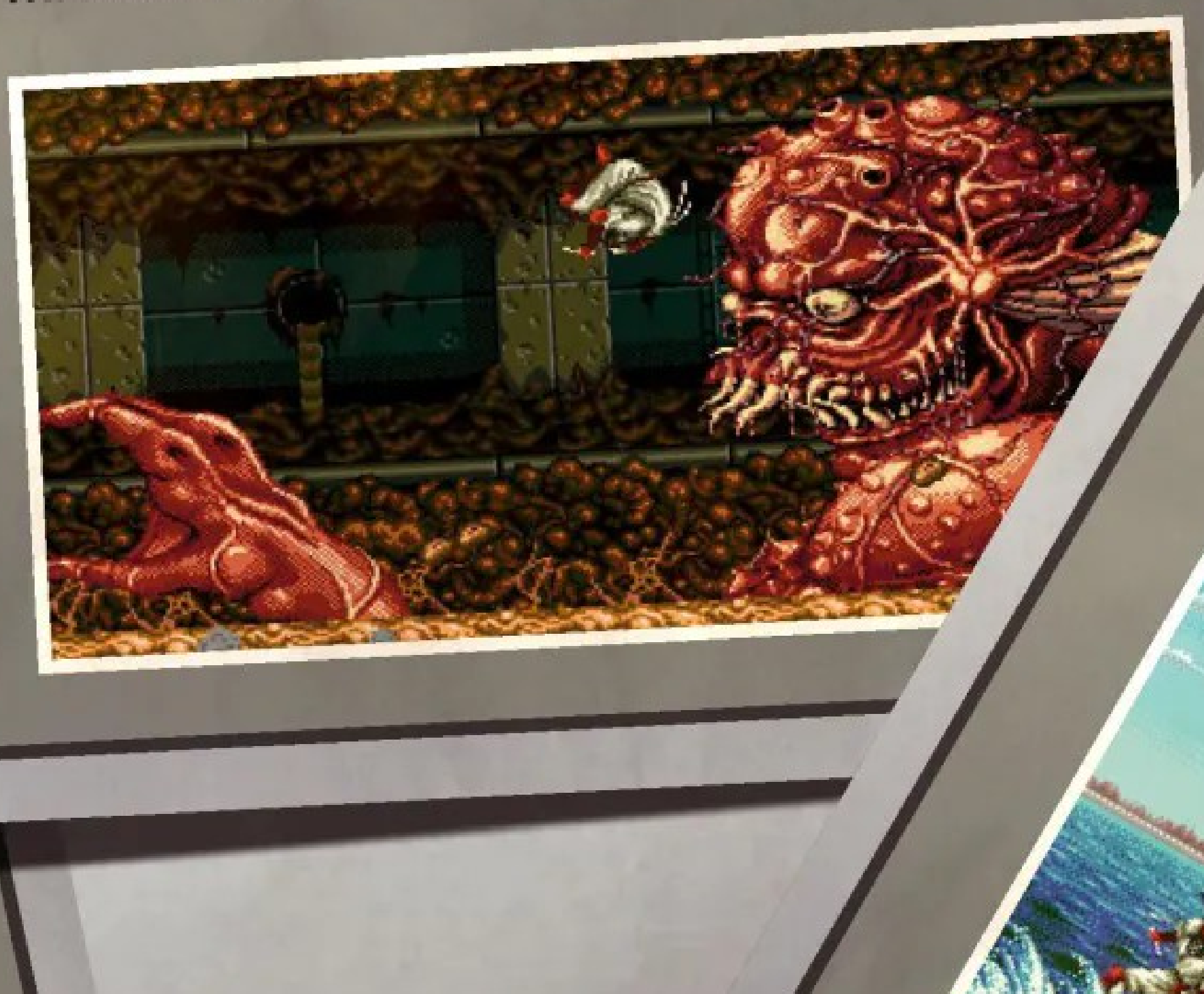


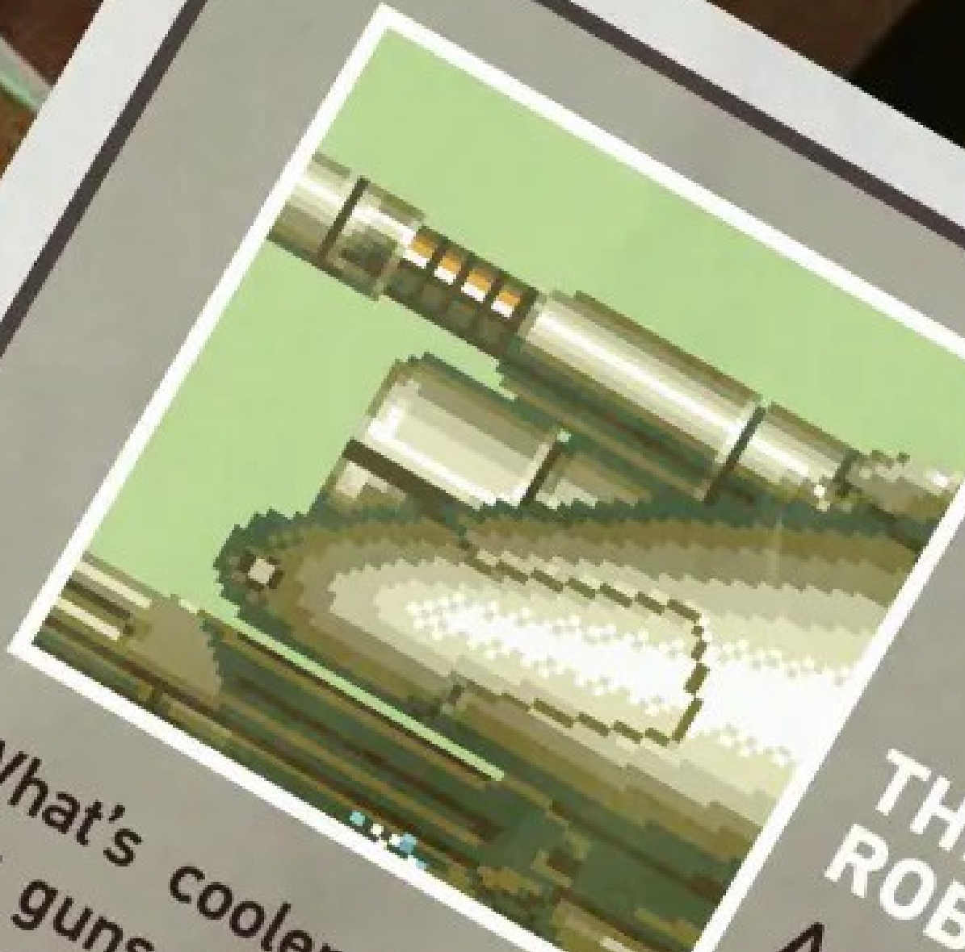
File No. 9

THE SLUDGE MONSTER

Appearance: SHINOBI III

Walking away with the award for Ugliest Looking Thing Anyone Has Ever Had To Do Battle With is *Shinobi III's* Sludge Monster. Seeing this freakish monstrosity track you through the entire third stage with his homing missiles, and then rise from a floor of pink squishy sewage waste, can be considered one of the most tingling experiences on Mega Drive. But when its giant head filled the entire right-hand side of the screen, and its lumbering webbed hand lashed out to ensnare Joe, you knew Sega had pulled out all of the stops to make Musashi's final mission his most memorable one.



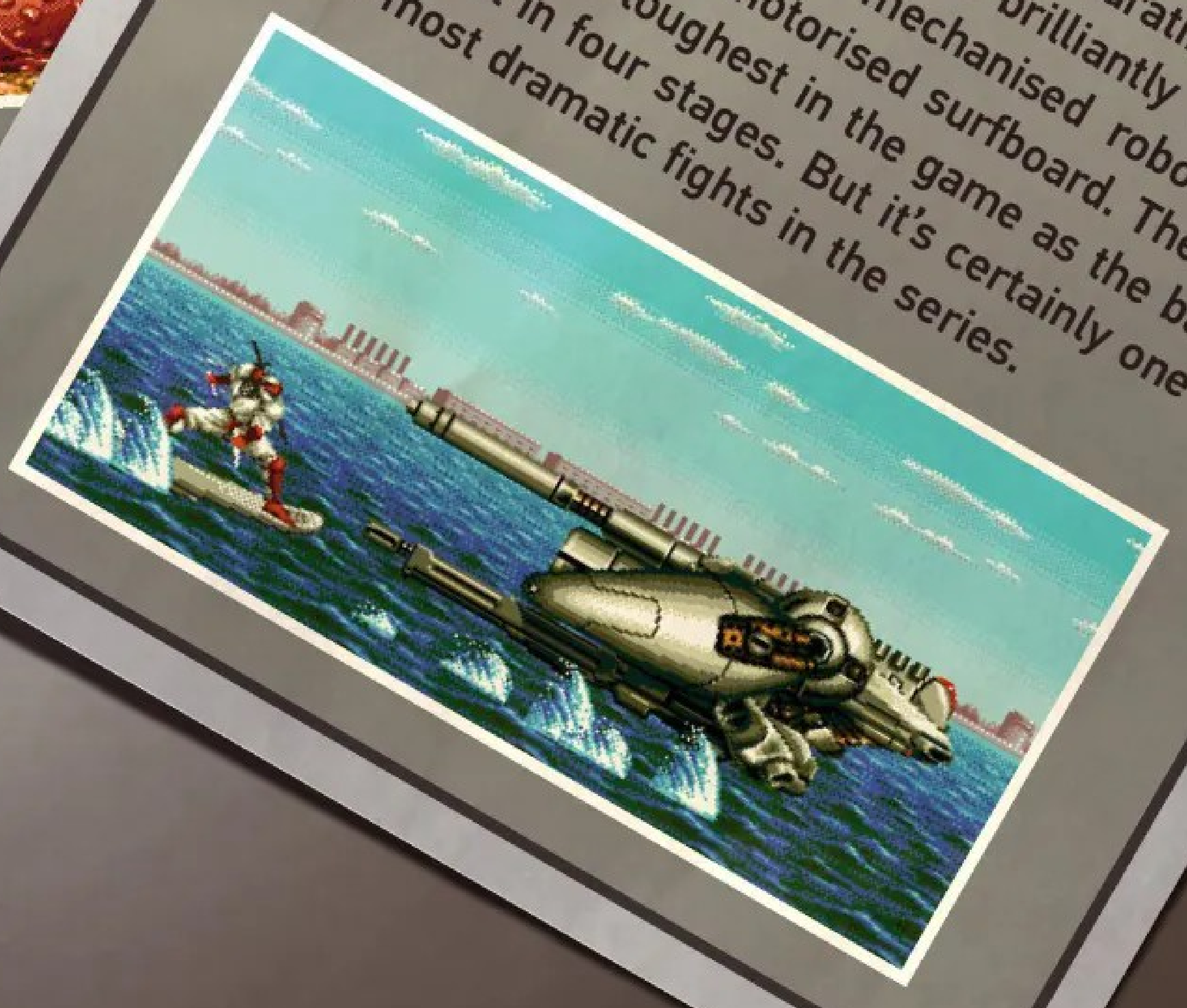


File No. 10

THE ARMOURED ROBOT

Appearance: SHINOBI III

What's cooler than ninjas? Easy, robots with big guns. What's cooler than robots with giant guns? Ninjas on surfboards fighting robots with big guns. Yep, *Shinobi III's* exhilarating *Contra*-style surfboard stage ends brilliantly with Joe in pursuit of a giant mechanised robot while balancing on his motorised surfboard. The boss is one of the toughest in the game as the battle is fought in four stages. But it's certainly one of the most dramatic fights in the series.



MEGA MAN

Capcom's most enduring mascot may have a patchy rep but his incredible number of starring roles make him more prolific than Mario…

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** MEGA MAN
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** MEGA MAN
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** MEGA MAN 11
- » **FINEST HOUR:** MEGA MAN II
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** NICKING THE WEAPONS OF OTHER ROBOTS

The mid-Eighties was a time of steep competition as a multitude of producers all vied for top positions on the new home consoles. Among the masses, Capcom found success with 1985's Ghosts 'N Goblins on NES, but the company needed a mascot to lift it into the mass gaming consciousness. Back then, Capcom was but a fraction of the leviathan it is today, and a limited workforce dictated that Mega Man's life was largely in the hands of one man: Keiji Inafune. Inafune not only developed all of the character art and designs, he also constructed these designs into pixel form, as well as creating the game's logo, packaging and instruction booklet. In many ways, this initial release failed. The box art was a joke, the graphics were mediocre, and the story was far from original. The result of all this was limited commercial success. But one element was sublime: the gameplay.

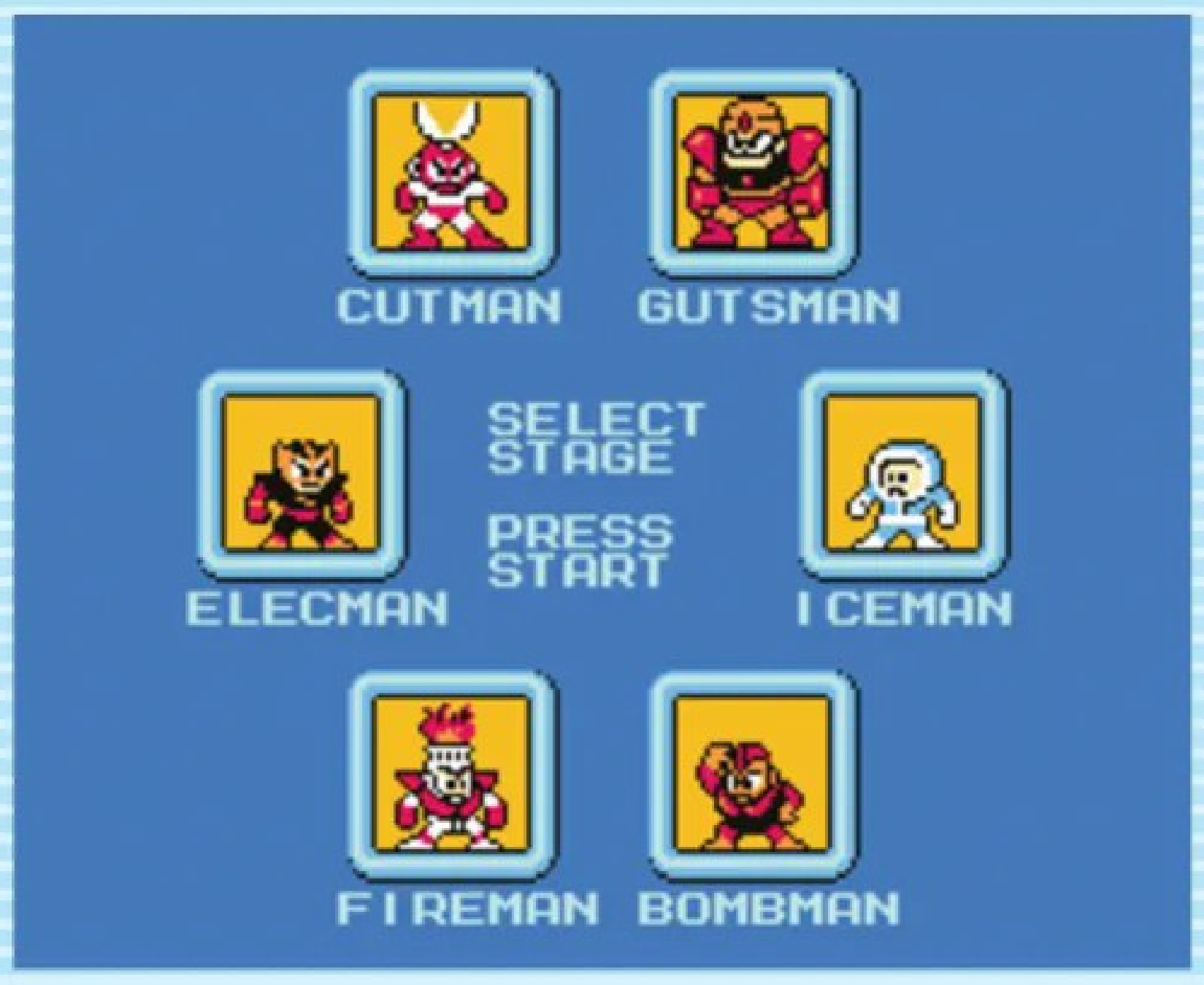
The non-linear format, in which players can choose the order of levels, and the idea of stealing bosses' weapons were innovations at the time and gave Mega Man 2 the framework from which to reach the mass consumer. Though fundamentally the same game, the second in the series added polish by the spade. The boss count was increased to eight, passwords were added, Mega Man's powers could be upgraded with three items from Dr Light the graphics were unique and wonderfully stylised. Capcom had given the franchise the treatment it deserved, shown a willingness to deliver a top-quality product and left us enthusiastic about its future. Number three came and delivered yet another top gaming experience. Then Capcom began to show the trait fans now agonisingly associate it with – releasing endless replicas of its top franchises at the sacrifice of quality. While other developers were moving on to the new 16-bit consoles, Capcom held Mega Man back for five years, until the SNES release of Mega Man 7 in 1995. Thankfully, the 1993 release of spin-off series Mega Man X bridged the gap.

Mega Man X tells the story of X, a robot capable of emotions and consciousness. Dr Light fears that X is too advanced for his time and hides him away for 100 years until he is unearthed by Dr Cain to fight against the Mavericks. X would be aided by new blonde comrade Zero. Keiji Inafune has previously admitted that Zero was originally intended to be the new Mega Man. However, after designing Zero, it was feared that fans wouldn't relate him to Mega Man due to wide visual differences, so X was used instead. Zero was finally made playable in X3 and used a contrasting gameplay mechanic; where X used long-range projectiles, Zero had a powerful sabre weapon for close-range combat. This contrasting gameplay, in conjunction with new moves and interconnected level design, made X another promising series. However, Capcom allowed X to slip into repetitive boredom, with each sequel wearing a little thinner than the last.

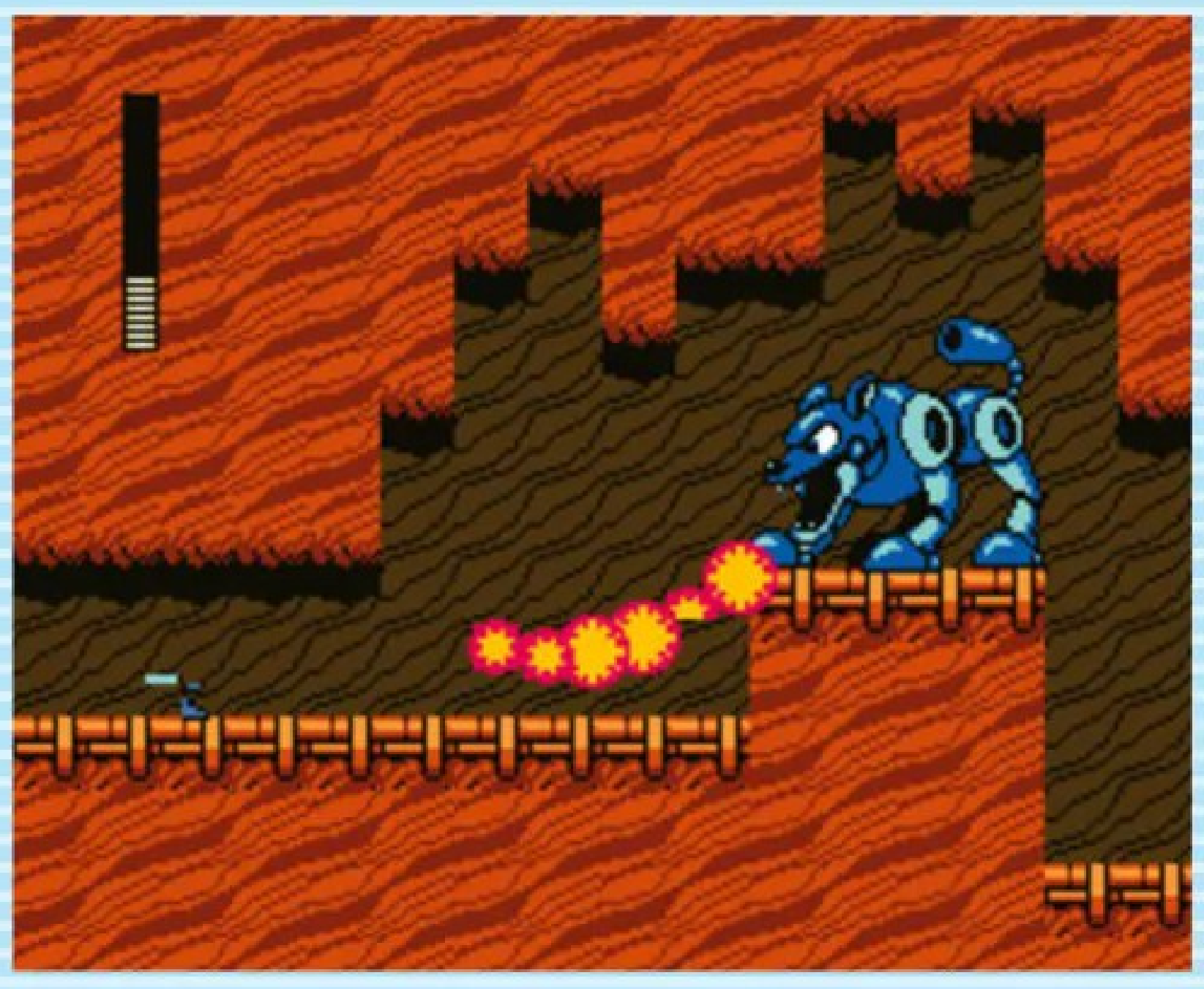
It is difficult to decide whether constantly replacing series with newer ones is a good thing or not. The old series are missed, the new ones relished. Either way, the classic Mega Man experience would be renovated twice more with the releases of Mega Man Zero for GBA, and Mega Man ZX for DS. Each of these games has held true to the Mega Man formula while still finding a uniqueness through stylistic flair and tweaks in gameplay. Mega Man Zero succeeded in this by giving fans what they had hoped for: Zero as a lead character. Zero also featured weapons mastering, the cyber elves (who are found throughout levels and can halve a boss's life or save Zero from a pit) and finally, the fantastic variable boss deaths, where the type of kill determines the finishing animation. Development for Mega Man ZX came in the form of free exploration before and during missions, having players find the mission areas themselves. There was also the addition of Biometal – weak points on bosses, that would heavily reduce their life but also reduce the rank received at the mission's end.

As a mascot, Mega Man's personality was left open enough to allow for a wide stable of games without contradicting his character. Mega Man Legends introduced the Blue Bomber to the third dimension and Battle Network had its unique hybrid of card-collector/action-strategy gameplay. Then there's the action-RPG Star Force, Mario Kart clone Battle And Chase and a whole host of other titles right down to board-game title Rock Board. All these, however, owe their lives to the platform-blasting pleasure of their forefather. The recent release of Mega Man 11 marks 31 years since Mega Man was told, at the original's ending, to "Fight, Mega Man! For everlasting peace". After 130 different games, the little Blue Bomber seems to have taken it to heart. *

> MAGIC MOMENTS



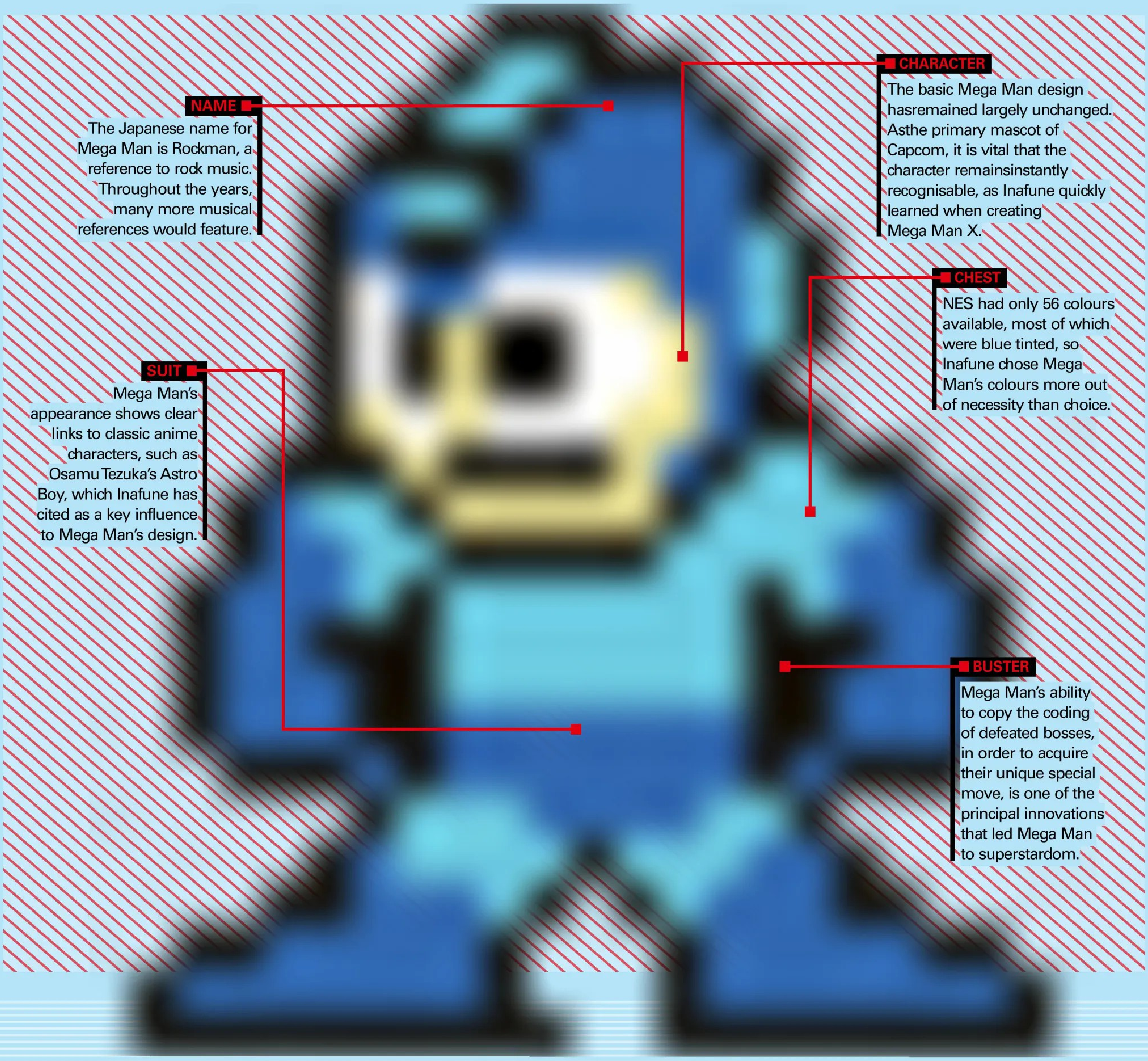
■ Sadly, the original 1987 game did not meet with much success.



■ *Mega Man 2* took the classic gameplay of the original and added a hefty amount of polish.

■ *Mega Man 3* was great fun. Sadly, this was the last title before the steep downhill slope.

■ The very first 16-bit title held a rather pleasant surprise within it – yes, it's Ryu's Hadouken.



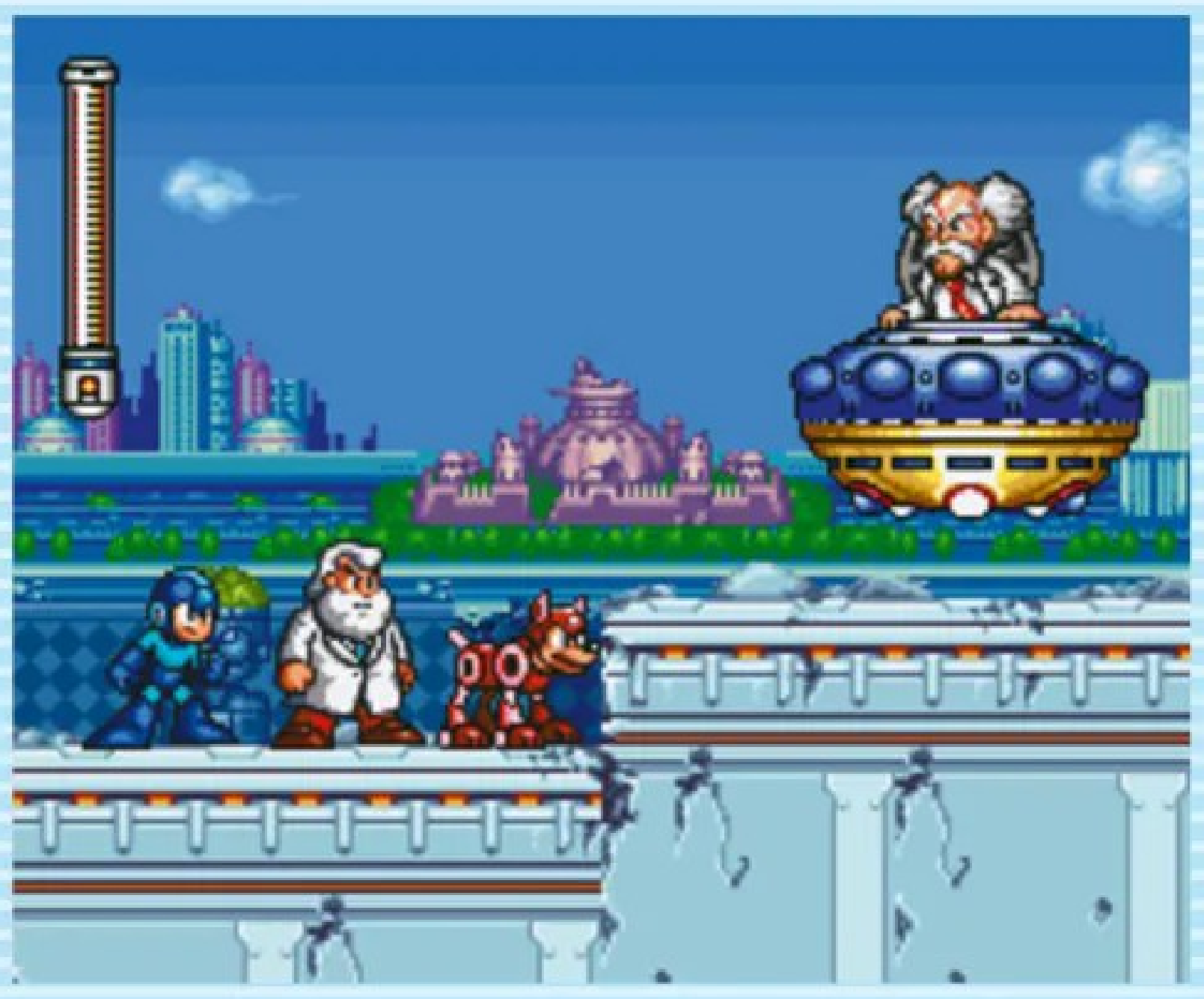
NAME
The Japanese name for Mega Man is Rockman, a reference to rock music. Throughout the years, many more musical references would feature.

CHARACTER
The basic Mega Man design hasremained largely unchanged. Asthe primary mascot of Capcom, it is vital that the character remainsinstantly recognisable, as Inafune quickly learned when creating Mega Man X.

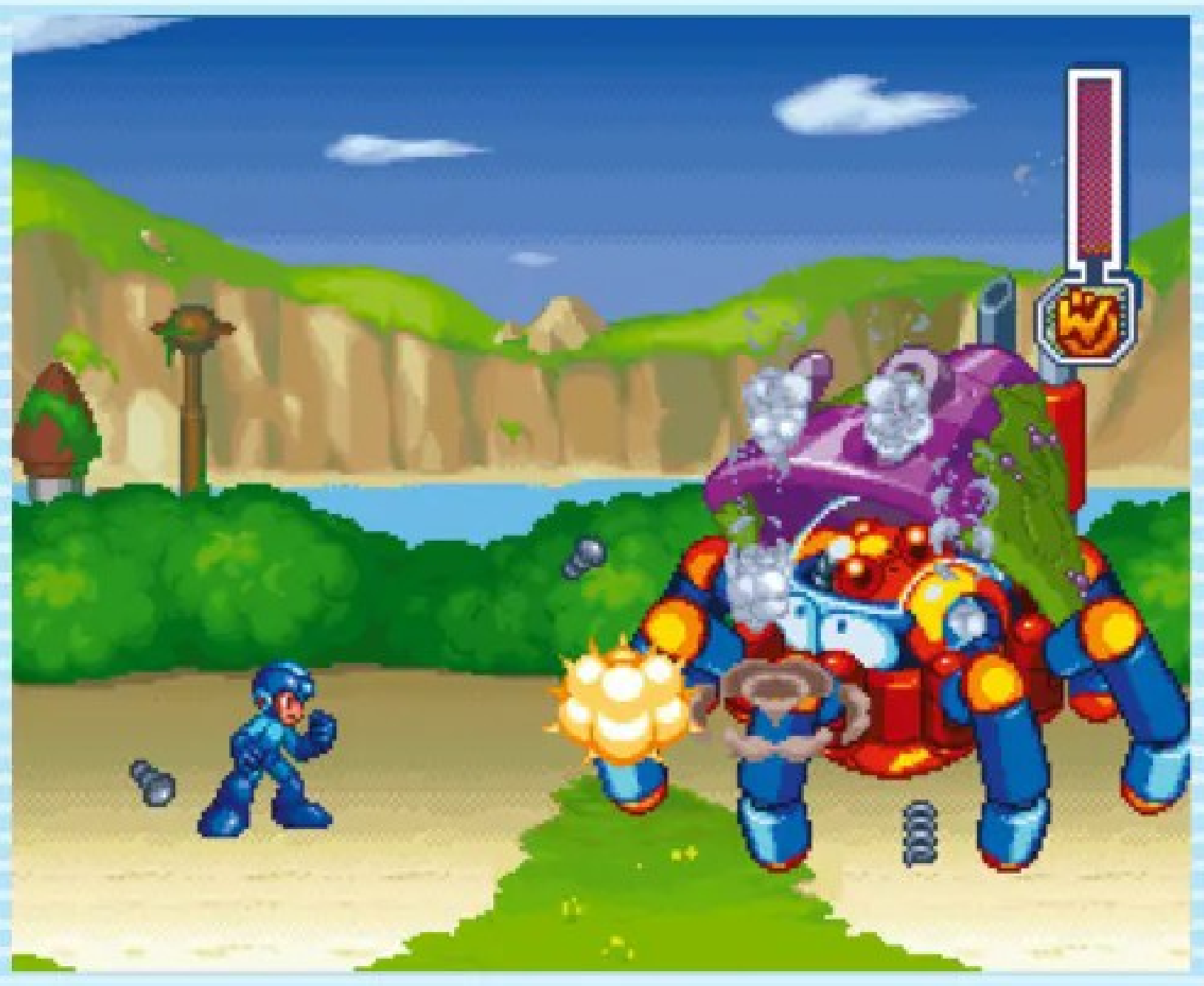
CHEST
NES had only 56 colours available, most of which were blue tinted, so Inafune chose Mega Man's colours more out of necessity than choice.

SUIT
Mega Man's appearance shows clear links to classic anime characters, such as Osamu Tezuka's Astro Boy, which Inafune has cited as a key influence to Mega Man's design.

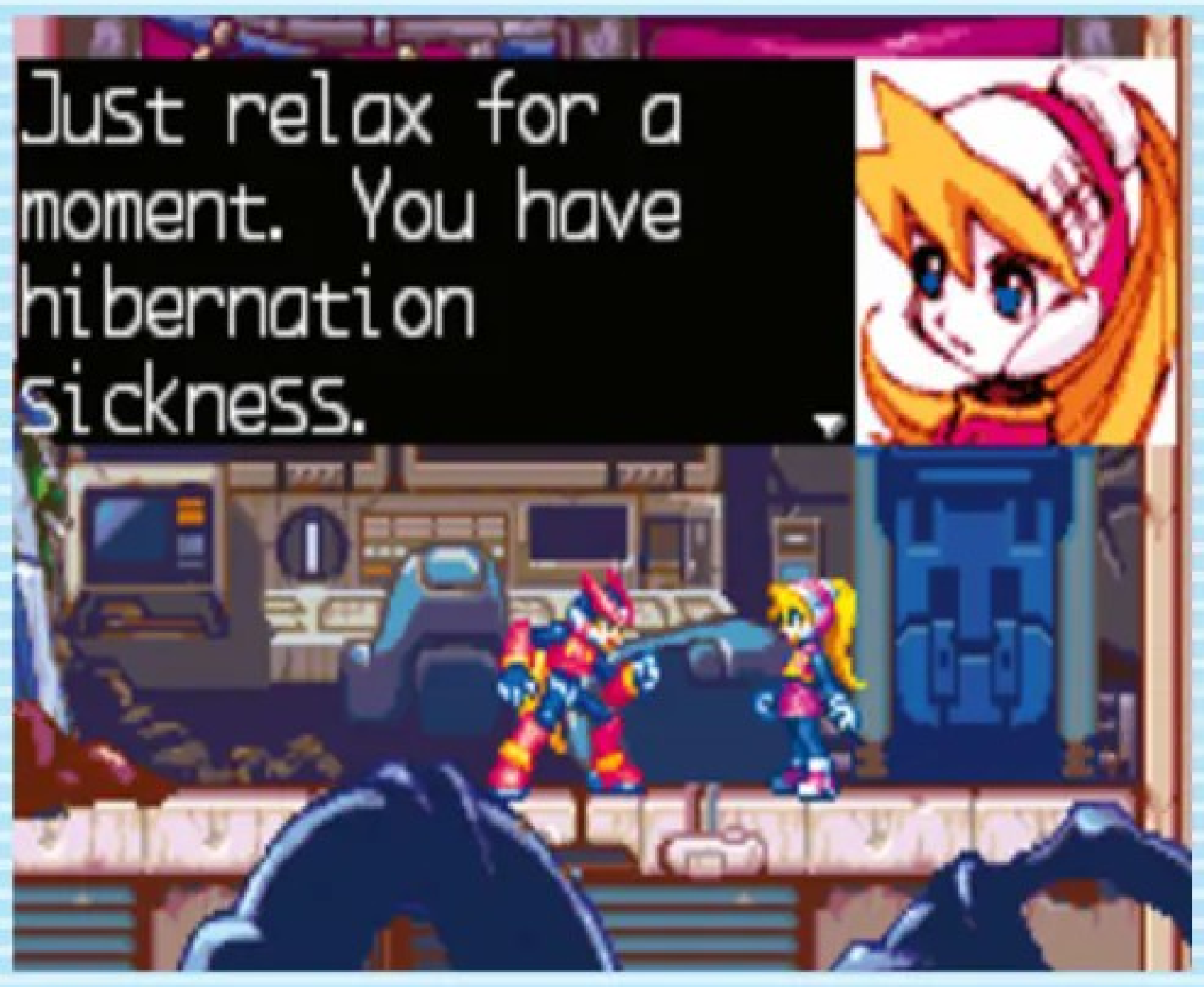
BUSTER
Mega Man's ability to copy the coding of defeated bosses, in order to acquire their unique special move, is one of the principal innovations that led Mega Man to superstardom.



Finally, the original series made its way to 16-bit glory. Just look at all those lovely colours.

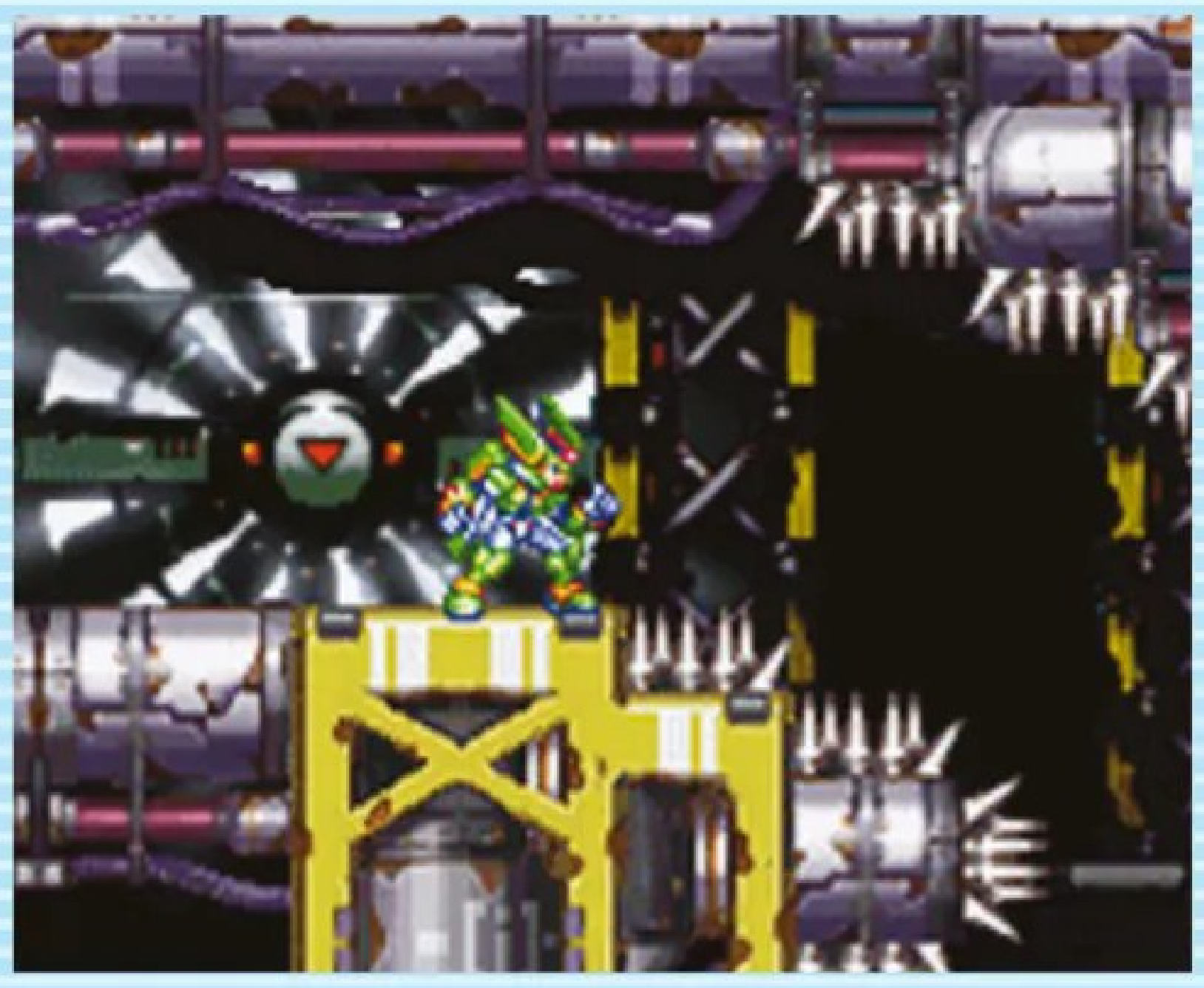


The 32-bit update added many extra features while staying true to the classic gameplay.



Just relax for a moment. You have hibernation sickness.

Finally, *Mega Man* fans got what they had been waiting for – Zero as a leading character.



Mega Man ZX made wonderful use of the DS, and free exploration added a unique twist.

MEGA MAN
THE PLATFORM GAMES

MEGA MAN

Released in 1987, the original *Mega Man* wasn't wildly successful. The gameplay was excellent, but low-key presentation failed to grab mainstream attention. Capcom put more time and effort into the following two sequels and both were of the highest quality. Five years of frustration came before Mega Man's 16-bit debut with *Mega Man 7*, but this was overshadowed by the more stylised *Mega Man X* series.

NAME: Mega Man
YEAR: 1987
FORMAT: NES, PC

NAME: Mega Man 2
YEAR: 1988
FORMAT: NES

MEGA FACT:
Inafune had to bargain with Capcom to be allowed to design a sequel to commercial failure, *Mega Man*. It was developed alongside other games in his spare time.

NAME: Mega Man 3
YEAR: 1990
FORMAT: NES, PC

NAME: Mega Man 4
YEAR: 1991
FORMAT: NES

MEGA FACT:
Mega Man 4 has the highest number of weapons in the original *Mega Man* series.

NAME: Mega Man 5
YEAR: 1992
FORMAT: NES

NAME: Mega Man 6
YEAR: 1993
FORMAT: NES

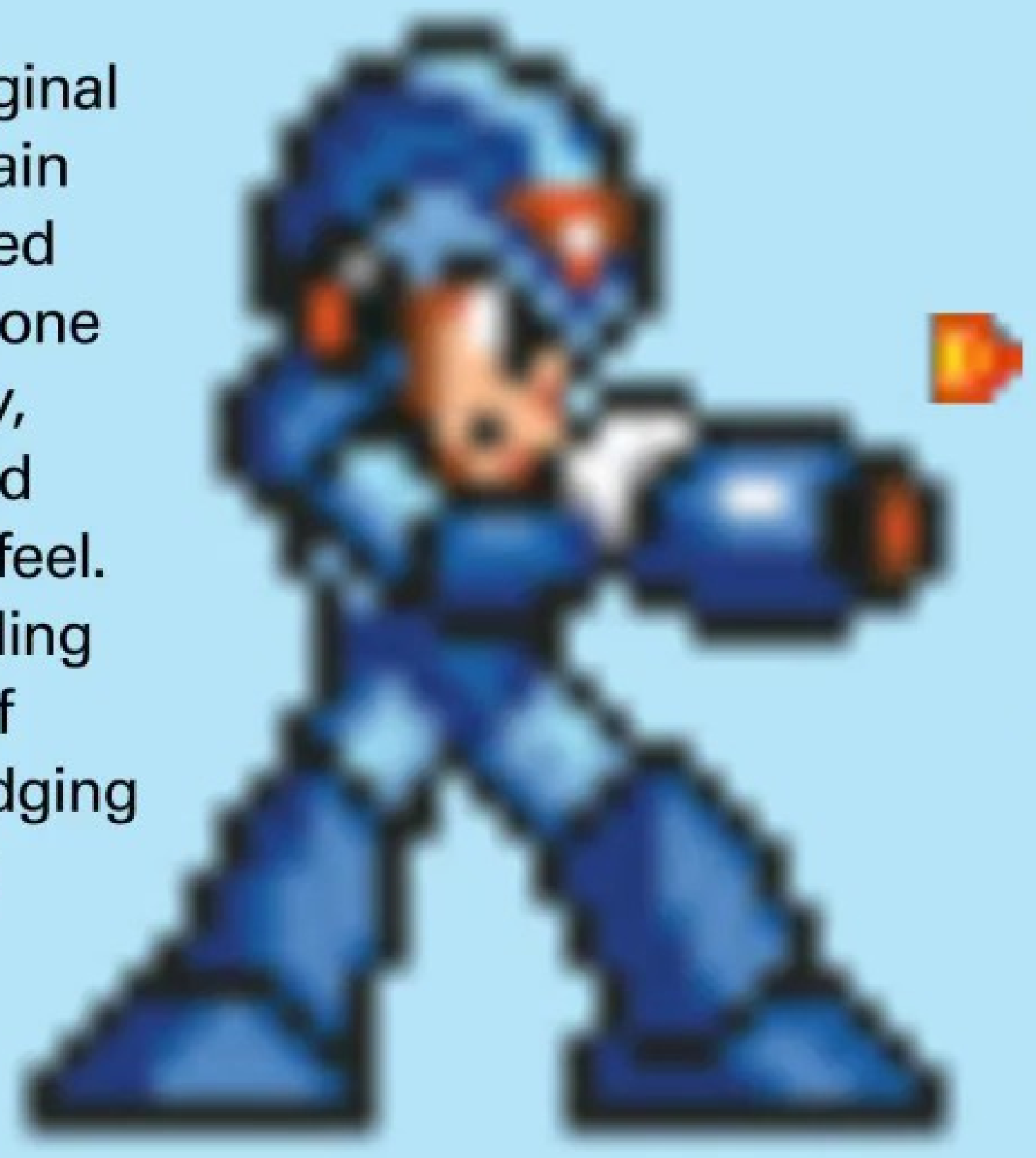
NAME: Mega Man 7
YEAR: 1995
FORMAT: SNES

MEGA FACT:
The only original game to be released exclusively on CD-ROM, *Mega Man 8* included anime-like FMV cut-scenes.

NAME: Mega Man 8
YEAR: 1996
FORMAT: PSone, Saturn

MEGA MAN X

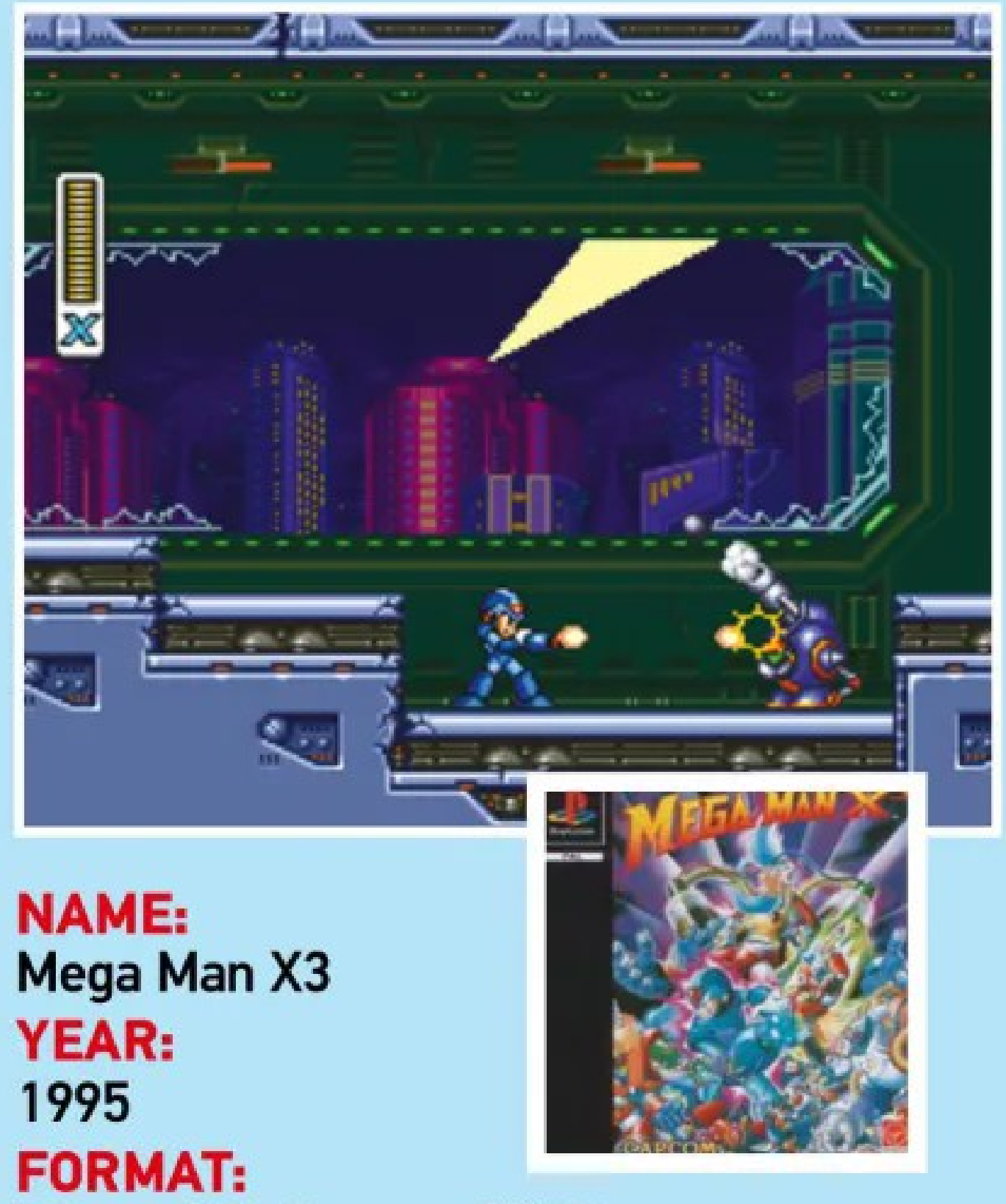
Mega Man X is a continuation of the original series in plot and gameplay with two main differences. The first is the interconnected style of level design, whereby events in one stage change those in another. Secondly, X had several new abilities that refreshed gameplay while maintaining the classic feel. These included clinging to walls and sliding down them, the dash, and, in a breath of genius, the Hadouken – successfully bridging the gap between Capcom's two leading franchises. The introduction of close-range fighting pal Zero in *X3* helped widen the gameplay mechanics.



MEGA FACT:
Mega Man X was remade by Taito for the PSP in 2005 as *Mega Man Maverick Hunter X*.

NAME: Mega Man X
YEAR: 1993
FORMAT: NES, PC

NAME: Mega Man X2
YEAR: 1994
FORMAT: SNES



NAME: Mega Man X3
YEAR: 1995
FORMAT: PSone, PC, Saturn, SNES

NAME:
Mega Man X4
YEAR:
1997
FORMAT:
PSone, Saturn, PC

MEGA FACT:
The US PlayStation release of *Mega Man X4* was denied by Sony as part of an early strategy to outlaw 2D games. The release was eventually allowed when Capcom threatened to withhold *Resident Evil 2*.

NAME:
Mega Man X5
YEAR:
2000
FORMAT:
PSone, PC

NAME:
Mega Man X6
YEAR:
2001
FORMAT:
PSone

MEGA FACT:
Mega Man X6 was the first to not be directed by Keiji Inafune. The prolific designer was presumably occupied with the first Onimusha at the time.

NAME:
Mega Man X7
YEAR:
2003
FORMAT:
PS2, PC

NAME:
Mega Man X8
YEAR:
2004
FORMAT:
PS2, PC

MEGA MAN ZERO

Zero took charge in a series that greatly increased the difficulty level, which is escalated by him having only one life. Instead of gaining a boss's weapon as in X and the classic series, Zero shows hints of Mega Man Battle Network in the acquiring of elemental powers. One of the best elements is in the weapons-levelling, explained in the game as Zero recovering lost skills after suffering from amnesia.

NAME:
Mega Man Zero
YEAR:
2002
FORMAT:
GBA

MEGA FACT:
New enemies can be unlocked in *Mega Man Zero 3* by using a GBA link cable to transfer data from the RPG *Mega Man Battle Network 4*.

NAME:
Mega Man Zero 2
YEAR:
2003
FORMAT:
GBA

NAME:
Mega Man Zero 3
YEAR:
2004
FORMAT:
GBA

NAME:
Mega Man Zero 4
YEAR:
2005
FORMAT:
GBA

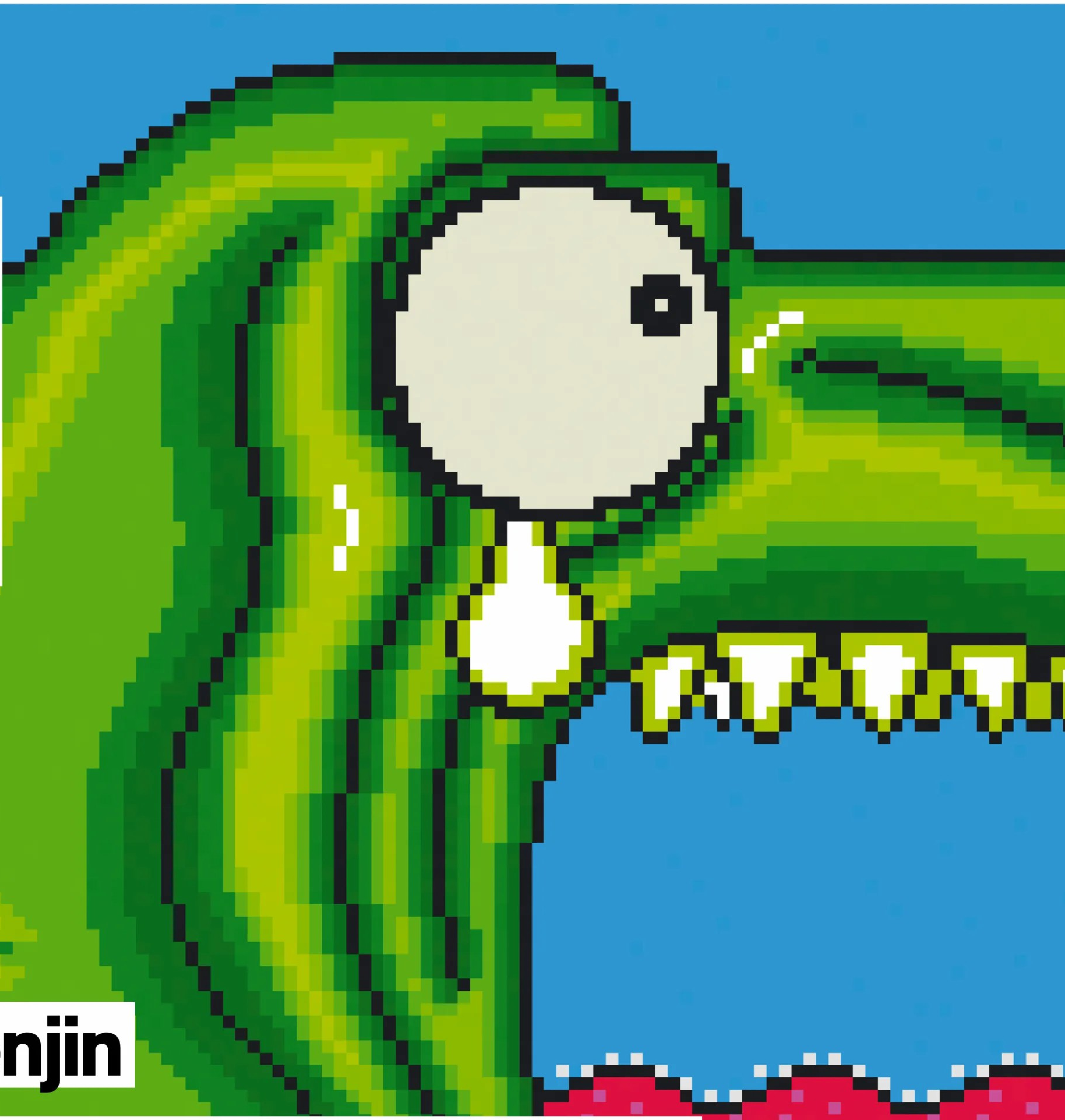
MEGA MAN ZX

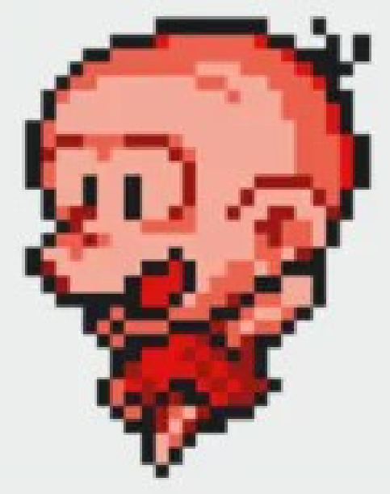
Mega Man ZX combines elements of both the classic and *Zero* series. Once a mission has been selected, players have to find the mission area and have free exploration during and between missions. Computer chips are collected and life-ups are hidden throughout. One of few changes is in the bosses' Biometal weak spots that greatly reduce their health.

MEGA FACT:
Mega Man ZX was the first *Mega Man* since 1987 to include a female protagonist.

NAME:
Megaman ZX
YEAR:
2006
FORMAT:
Nintendo DS

NAME:
Megaman aZX Advent
YEAR:
2007
FORMAT:
Nintendo DS





ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** BONK
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** PC-GENJIN
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** BONK'S RETURN
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SUPER BONK
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** HEADBUTTS

PC-Genjin

FANCY A BONK?

» **PC ENGINE** » **1990** » **RED COMPANY**

Sometimes you see a game featured in a magazine and know that you just have to have it, no matter what the cost. Viewing PC Kid in CVG was one of those times. I'd already been drawn to the machine due to the likes of *Gunhed* and the astonishing-looking port of R-Type, and I would impatiently wait for each new issue in the hope of more PC Engine goodness.

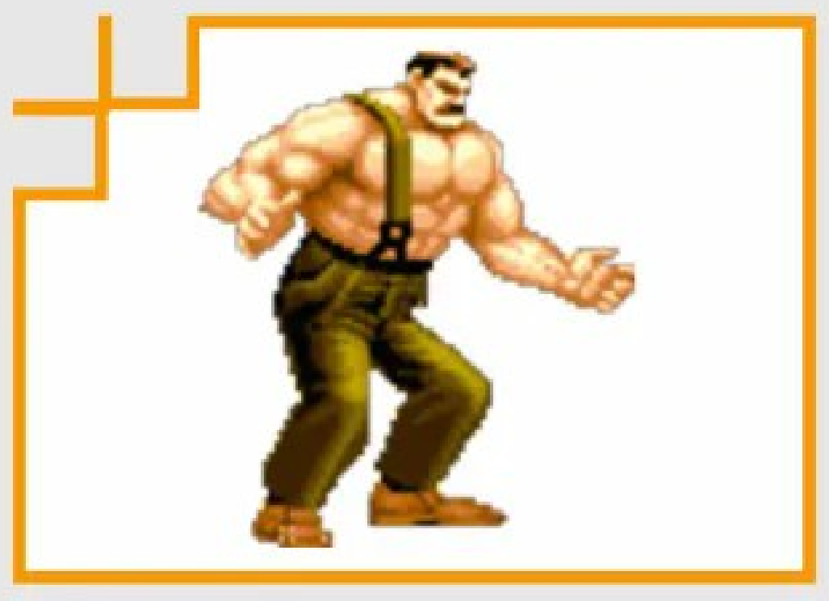
Unfortunately, the PC Engine's high price tag ensured that I wouldn't be able to treat myself to a machine until I was a working adult, and when I finally bought myself a PC Engine GT – I love handhelds – *PC-Genjin*, or *Bonk's* Adventure as it was hilariously known in the States, was one of the first games I picked up for it. I wasn't disappointed either, as it's a truly wonderful platformer. Then, of course, there's Bonk himself – or PC Kid, as I'd always called him. Packed with Mario's charm and Sonic's irrepressible cool, he became something of a figurehead for NEC's tiny machine and went on to star in numerous sequels and spin-offs. But that first game, especially when viewed on the PC Engine GT's glorious little screen, was where it all began for me, and I was not disappointed with the end result. The bright, cheerful backgrounds, cute animation and excellent audio didn't look aged when I first played the game in 2002 – yes, it took that long for me to finally get a machine – and it still looks great now. Gameplay is admittedly simplistic, but it remains fun to play thanks to its well-structured level design, great variety in its environments and its entertaining nature. Mario may have had his bottom bounce and Sonic his spin dash, but PC Kid had a devastating head butt that could always be guaranteed to raise a smile. After all, who doesn't like running around, nutting dinosaurs? While the sequels were arguably better games, I'll always have a special fondness for the original. In fact, this spread is an approximation of the very first screenshot I ever saw of it. That's how much of an impact it had on me back in the day.

The love affair for me, though, will always be with the original game, and while Pitfall Harry seems to now have been forgotten by Activision, he isn't lost to me. *

2470

MIKE HAGGAR

For this entry in our book we take a look at the father-in-law you really don't want to upset: Metro City's hulking protector Mike Haggar



ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** MIKE HAGGAR
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** FINAL FIGHT
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** MARVEL VS CAPCOM: INFINITE
- **» FINEST HOUR:** FINAL FIGHT
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** BACK SLAMS

Despite the quick Bushin ninjitsu of Guy, and Cody's pretty-boy looks, any true *Final Fight* fan will always say 'Mike Haggar' when pressed on who they consider the real star of Capcom's revered beat-'em-up series. A videogame wrestler matched in popularity only by the bear-hugging biceps of his street fighting rival Zangief, Haggar has become the most popular wrestler to ever smash onto the videogame circuit, and for good reason.

When a thick layer of crime suffocates Metro City, the newly elected mayor, Mike Haggar, decides the time has come to clean up the streets. The Mad Gear Gang, led by a wealthy millionaire, rule the city, and after Haggar turns down a cash bribe in return for turning a blind eye to their activities, the Mad Gears decide to kidnap his daughter Jessica to force him under their control.

Haggar, who doesn't take kindly to being threatened, surprises his constituents by tearing off his shirt and donning a pair of green slacks and a single-support brace. Pulling together a crack team of muscle, made up of his old gym pal and Jessica's ex-boyfriend Cody, along with Cody's pal Guy, they venture out onto the means streets of Metro City to rescue her. It's not what you'd call a typical method of making the streets safer, but Mike Haggar is not your typical mayor.

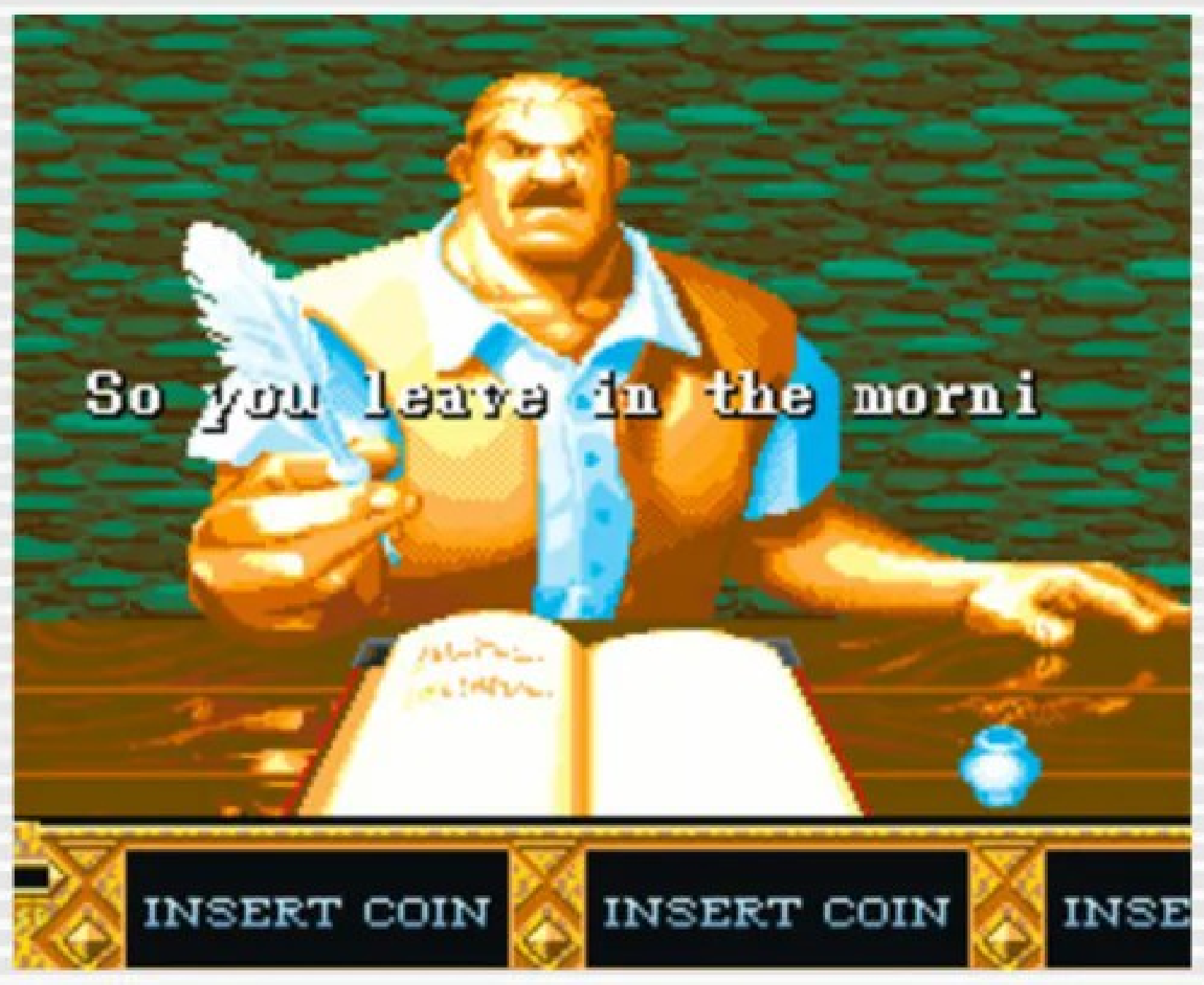
Final Fight's plot smacks of the popcorn action films of the Eighties. And while the 'rescue the pretty kidnapped girl' plot has been done a hundred times before in film and equally in videogames – *Kung Fu Master*, *Double Dragon* and *Super Mario Bros* – many studious fans have traced *Final Fight*'s plot and the decadent look of Metro City to the 1984 Walter Hill film *Streets Of Fire*. A weird mix of cheesy action meets rock opera set in a bizarre futuristic Fifties-style world, *Streets Of Fire*'s plot centres on the kidnapping of a pretty club singer, played by Diana Lane, at the hands of a ruthless gang called The Bombers, and the rescue mission initiated by the singer's ex-boyfriend – an ex-mercenary named Tom Cody – and his two friends. Weirdly, one of these is played by actor Rick Moranis and, before you think it, no, he doesn't play a Mike Haggar-type character, because there isn't one.

However, the look and characteristics of Capcom's fictional mayor still point to the big screen. You see, Haggar's life shares a weird parallel with the ex-wrestler/actor, Jesse 'The Governing Body' Ventura, who, post-retirement, went on to become the Governor of Minnesota in 1999. Jesse, who played the role of the cocky soldier Blain 'I ain't got time to bleed' Cooper in *Predator*, sported a Haggar-esque moustache and about a hundred thousand muscles, and shares an uncanny resemblance to Metro City's mayor. In fact, had a *Final Fight* movie been greenlit around the early-Nineties, we're pretty sure Jesse would have been a shoo-in for the role of Haggar, and Minnesota would have had to find itself a new governor.

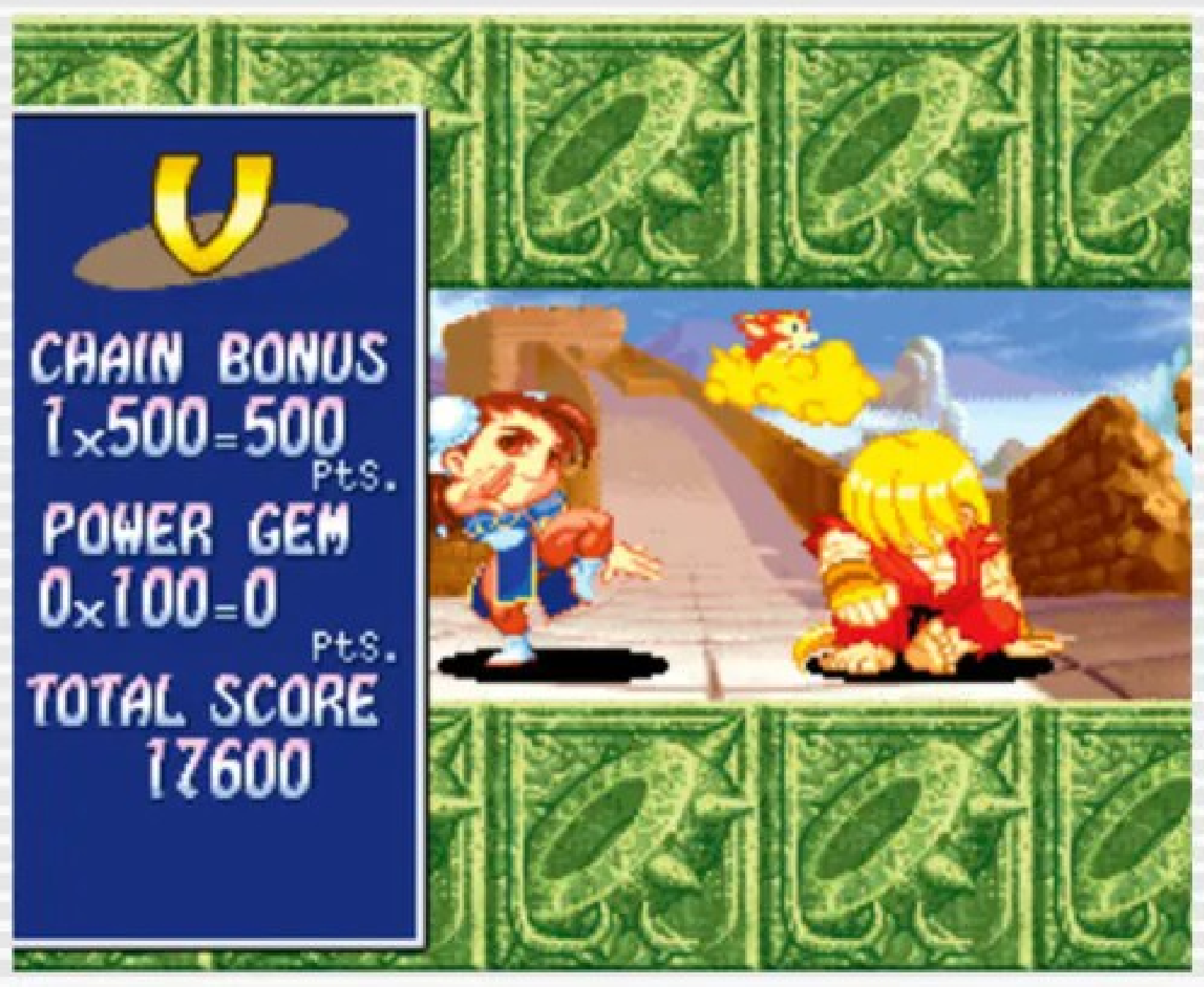
So why has Haggar become such an enduring character among fans? Well, we'd put it down to Capcom's obvious empathy for him. Haggar is the only member of the original *Final Fight* trio to have appeared in every game. Reappearing in *Final Fight Guy* and even getting a brief cameo in the god-awful PS2 3D fighter *Final Fight: Streetwise*, saw Haggar all but forgotten by the people of Metro City and working as a gym owner. Moreover, Haggar is the only character in the *Final Fight* series – and maybe even in Capcom history – to have his own videogame spin-off, appearing as a character in the brilliant *Saturday Night Slam Masters* wrestling series.

But what really sets Haggar is the wonderfully layered and deep back story Capcom gave the character. Haggar is portrayed as a protective father, an honest and hardworking mayor and an ex-pro wrestler, three characteristics that help give him a sense of humanity and make him instantly memorable. While Cody and Guy went on to become popular characters with fans of the series, there's no denying they are typical of the kind of characters usually found punching and kicking their way through screens of goons called P Radar and Tre Mendous. And even with *Final Fight*'s wonderful visuals and slick co-op mode, without its mayor supporting the campaign, the game would have become just another girlfriend rescue mission. Remove Haggar from *Final Fight* and it would be sorely missing something integral to its charm.

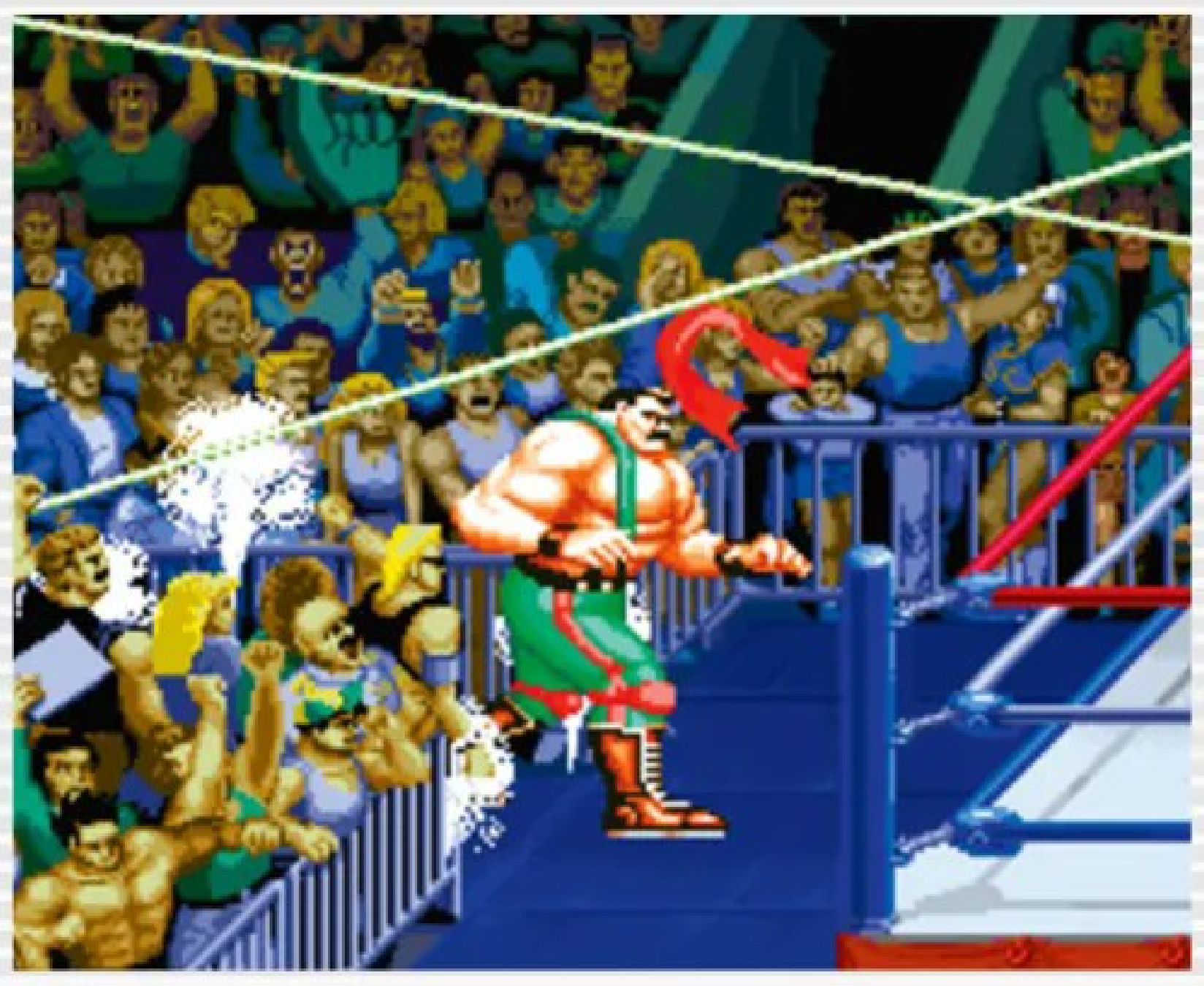
> MAGIC MOMENTS



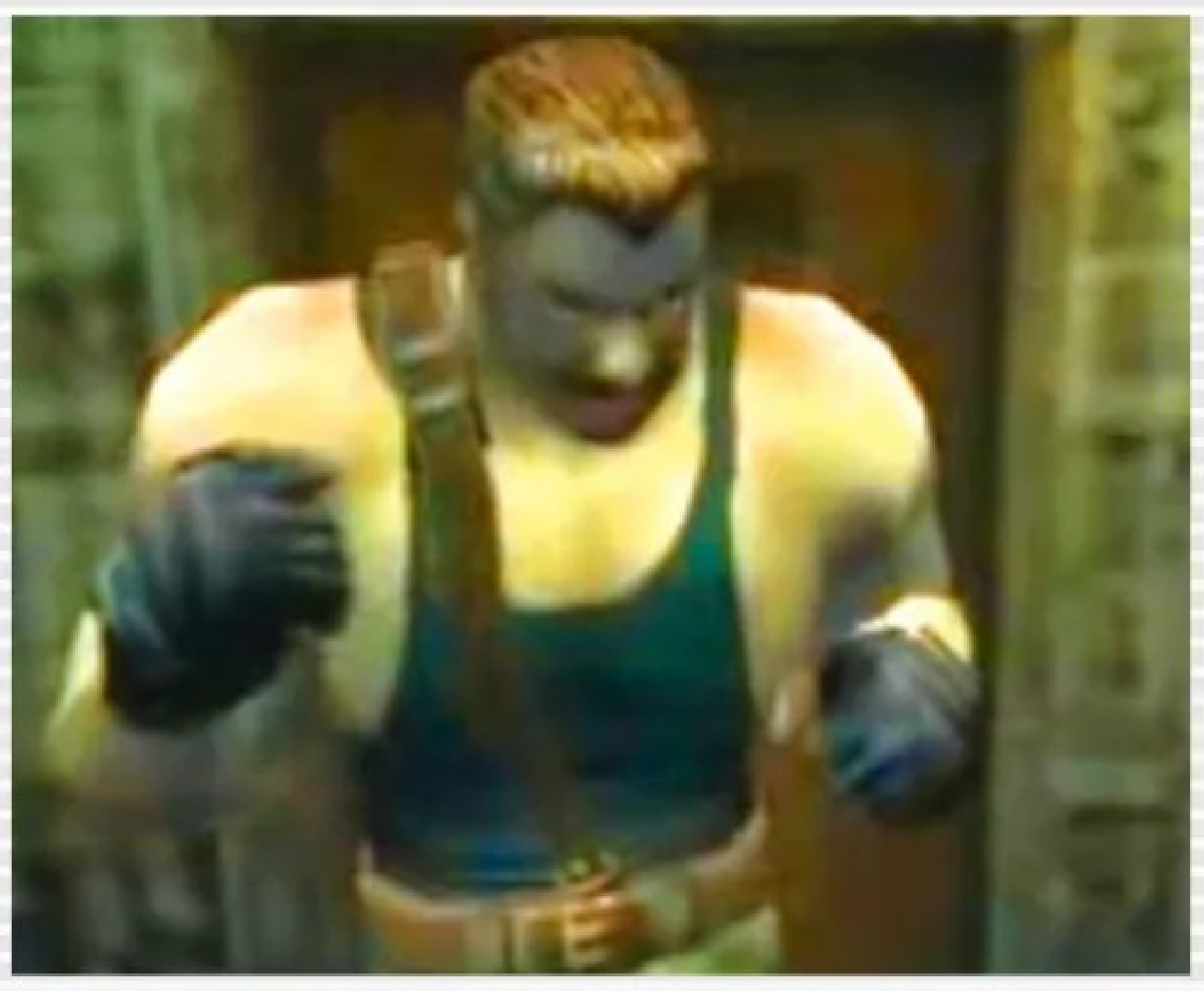
■ Haggar takes down your name at the start of *Dungeons & Dragons: Tower Of Doom*.



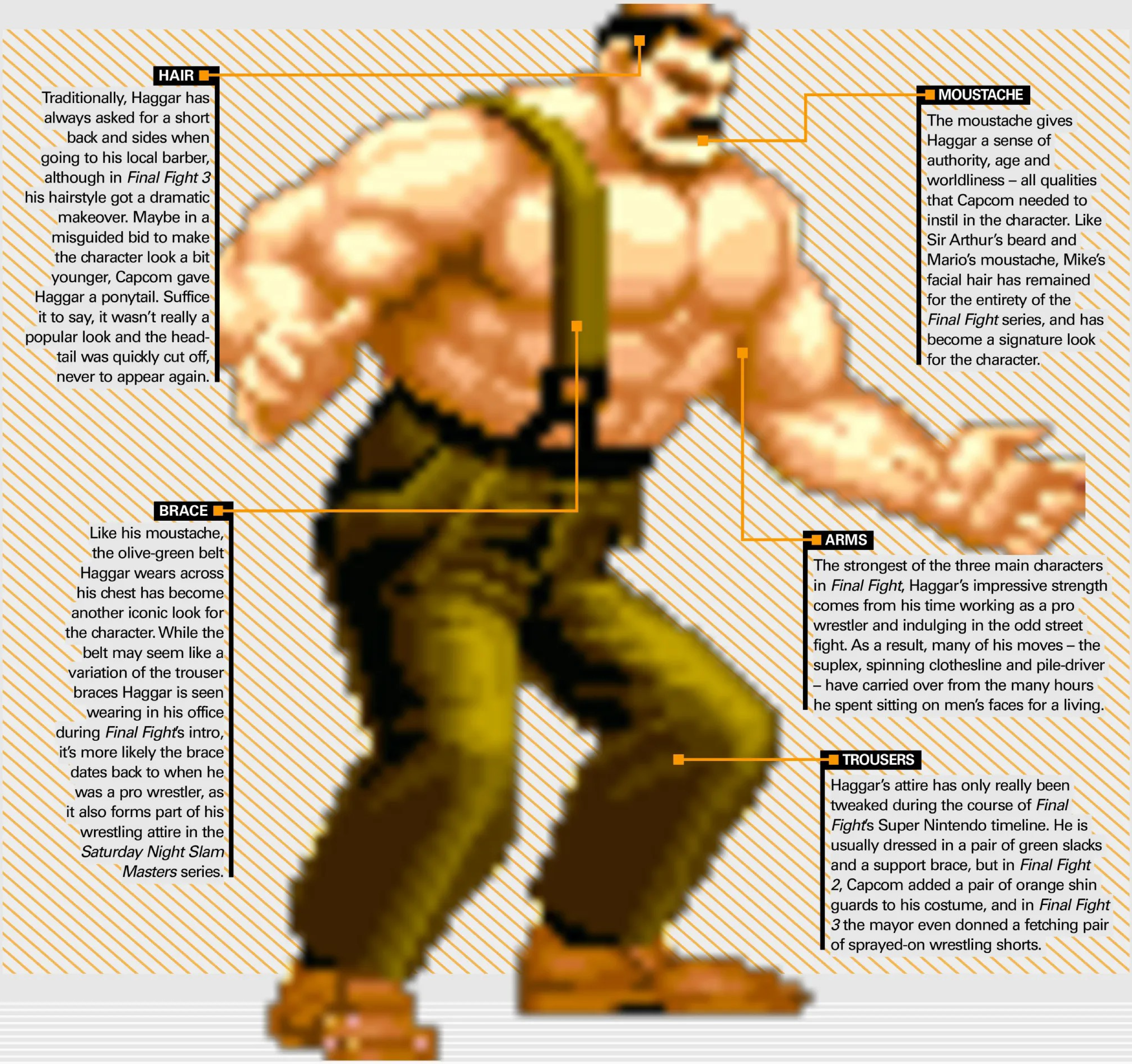
■ In Chun-Li's stage in *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* the wall breaks to reveal a familiar face.



■ Making his subtle entrance to the ring in the wrestling game *Saturday Night Slam Masters*.



■ Haggar makes a cameo in *Final Fight: Streetwise*, helping you dust up some thugs.



HAIR

Traditionally, Haggar has always asked for a short back and sides when going to his local barber, although in *Final Fight 3* his hairstyle got a dramatic makeover. Maybe in a misguided bid to make the character look a bit younger, Capcom gave Haggar a ponytail. Suffice it to say, it wasn't really a popular look and the head-tail was quickly cut off, never to appear again.

MOUSTACHE

The moustache gives Haggar a sense of authority, age and worldliness – all qualities that Capcom needed to instil in the character. Like Sir Arthur's beard and Mario's moustache, Mike's facial hair has remained for the entirety of the *Final Fight* series, and has become a signature look for the character.

BRACE

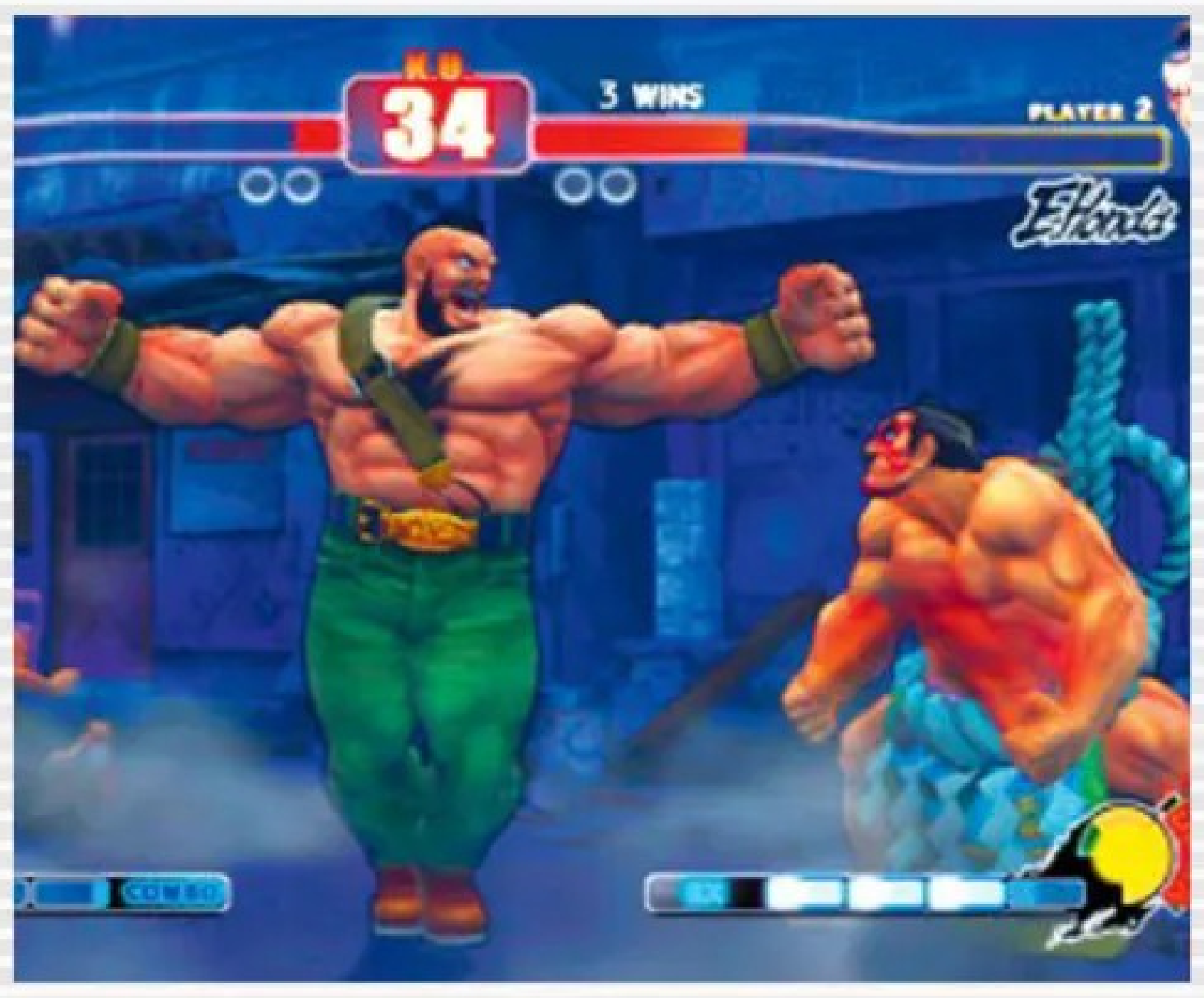
Like his moustache, the olive-green belt Haggar wears across his chest has become another iconic look for the character. While the belt may seem like a variation of the trouser braces Haggar is seen wearing in his office during *Final Fight*'s intro, it's more likely the brace dates back to when he was a pro wrestler, as it also forms part of his wrestling attire in the *Saturday Night Slam Masters* series.

ARMS

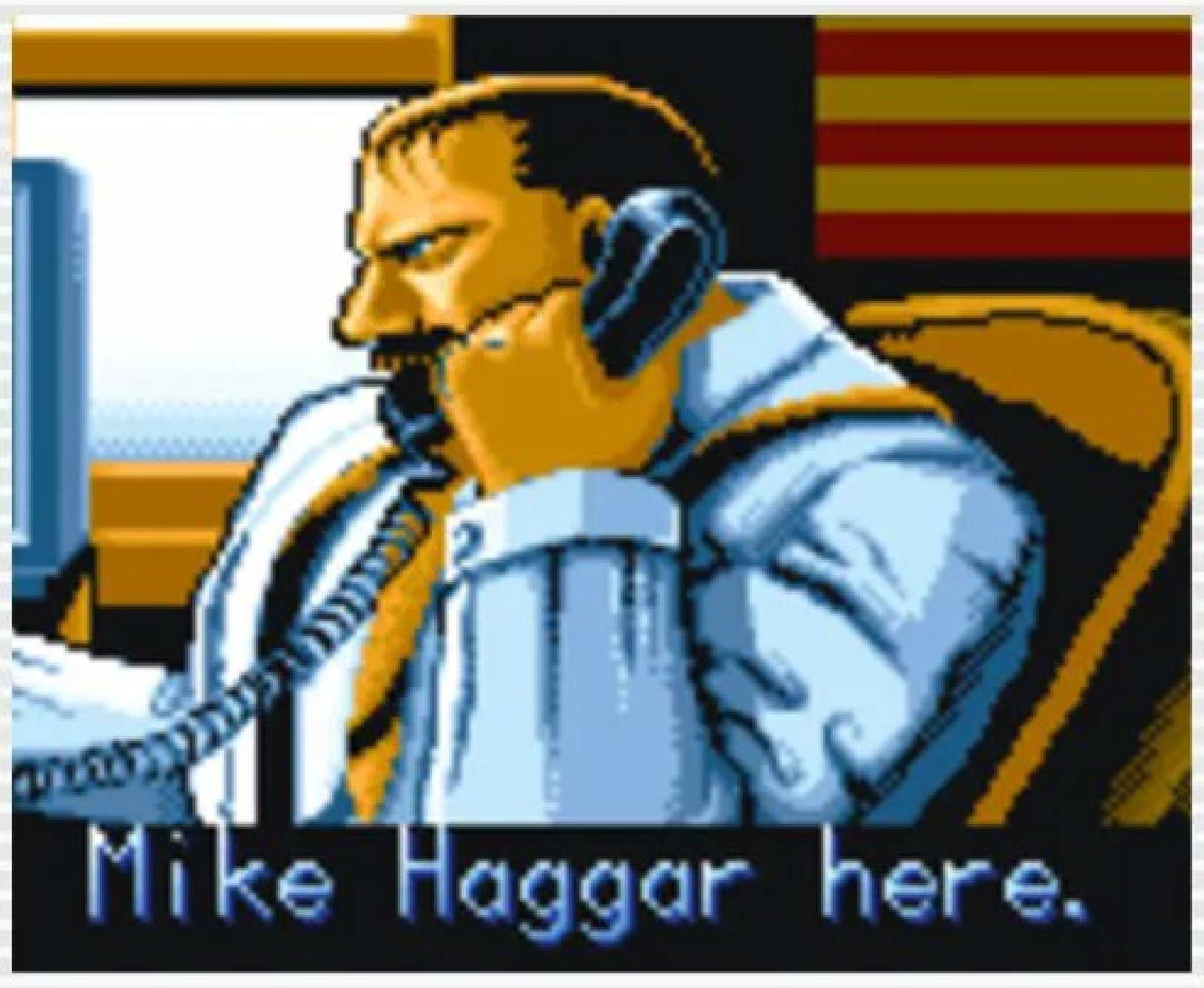
The strongest of the three main characters in *Final Fight*, Haggar's impressive strength comes from his time working as a pro wrestler and indulging in the odd street fight. As a result, many of his moves – the suplex, spinning clothesline and pile-driver – have carried over from the many hours he spent sitting on men's faces for a living.

TROUSERS

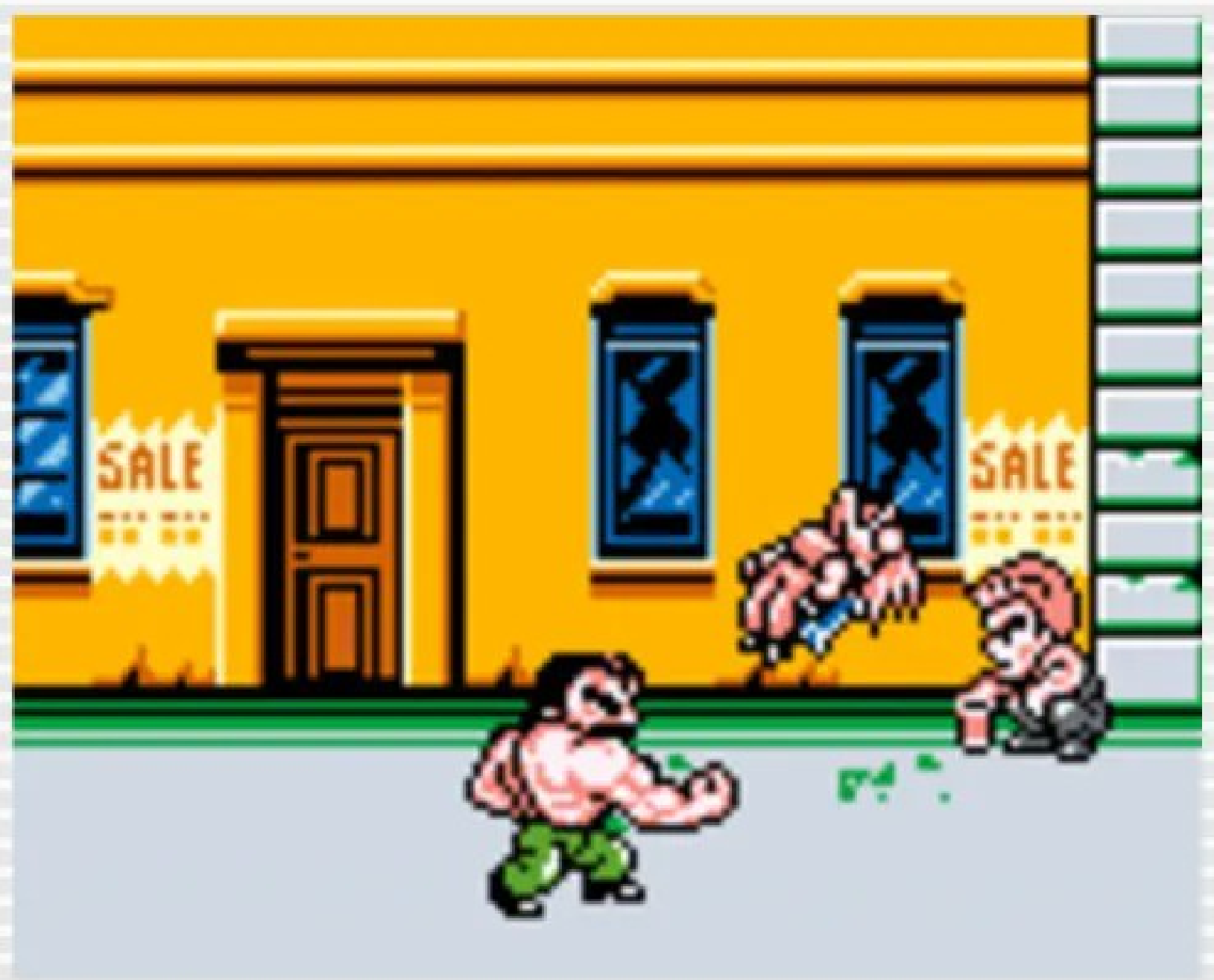
Haggar's attire has only really been tweaked during the course of *Final Fight*'s Super Nintendo timeline. He is usually dressed in a pair of green slacks and a support brace, but in *Final Fight 2*, Capcom added a pair of orange shin guards to his costume, and in *Final Fight 3* the mayor even donned a fetching pair of sprayed-on wrestling shorts.



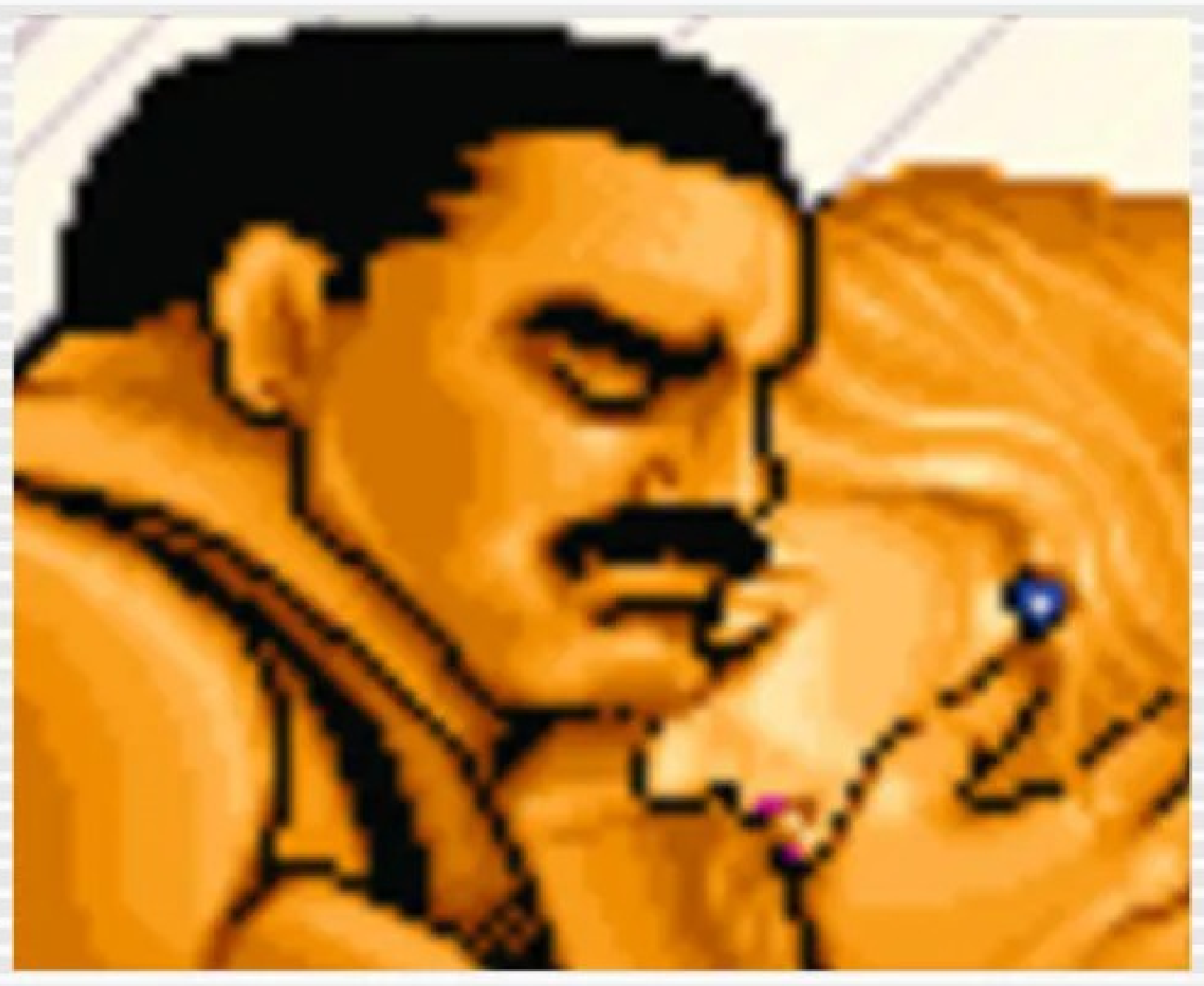
Capcom released a Haggar costume for Zangief, which plays on the pair's friendly rivalry.



Like takes the call from the Mad Gear Gang and discovers they've kidnapped his daughter.



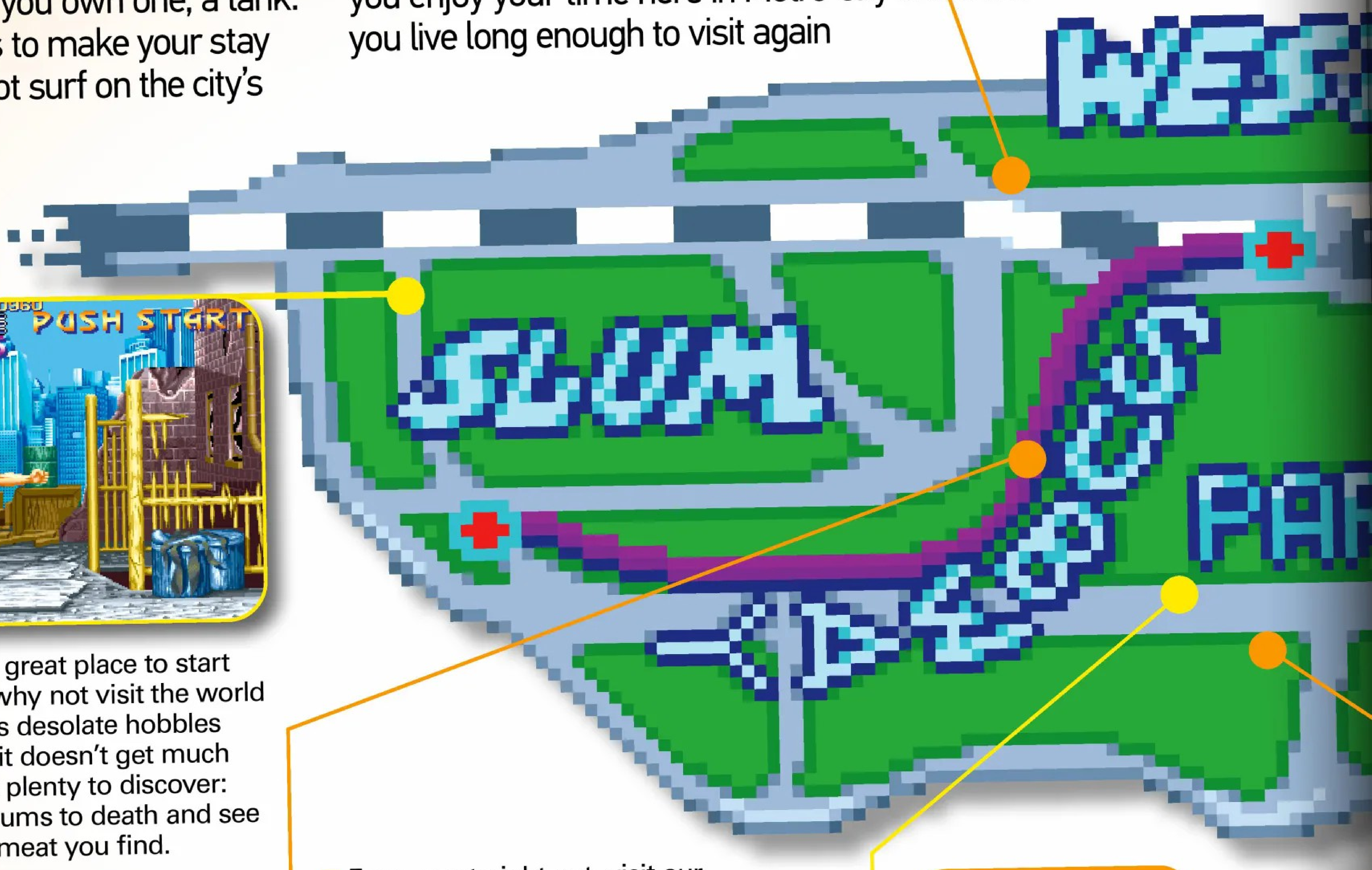
Mighty Final Fight made Haggar and co 'super deformed' and added soft RPG elements.



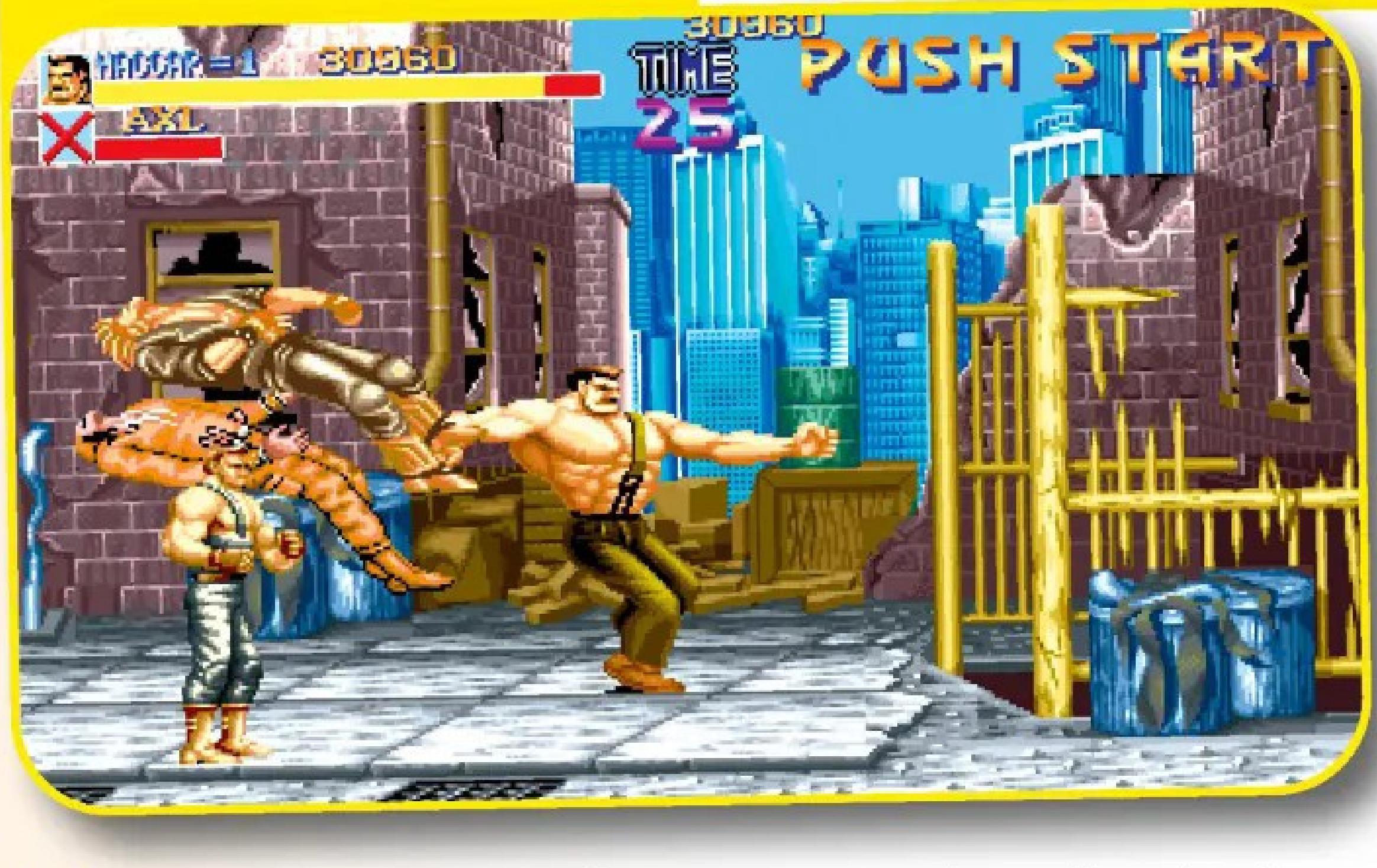
Mike is reunited with his daughter after beating Mad Gear. The pair share an emotional embrace.

Metro City:
A Tourist's Guide

Welcome to Metro City, home of the infamous wrestler-turned mayor Mike Haggar. When venturing outside it's advisable to have a stab vest, crash helmet and, if you own one, a tank. If you're looking for things to make your stay more memorable, why not surf on the city's famous crime waves, bask in the glorious blood-soaked streets, or take a bottle to any of the city's scruffy looking denizens? We hope you enjoy your time here in Metro City and trust you live long enough to visit again

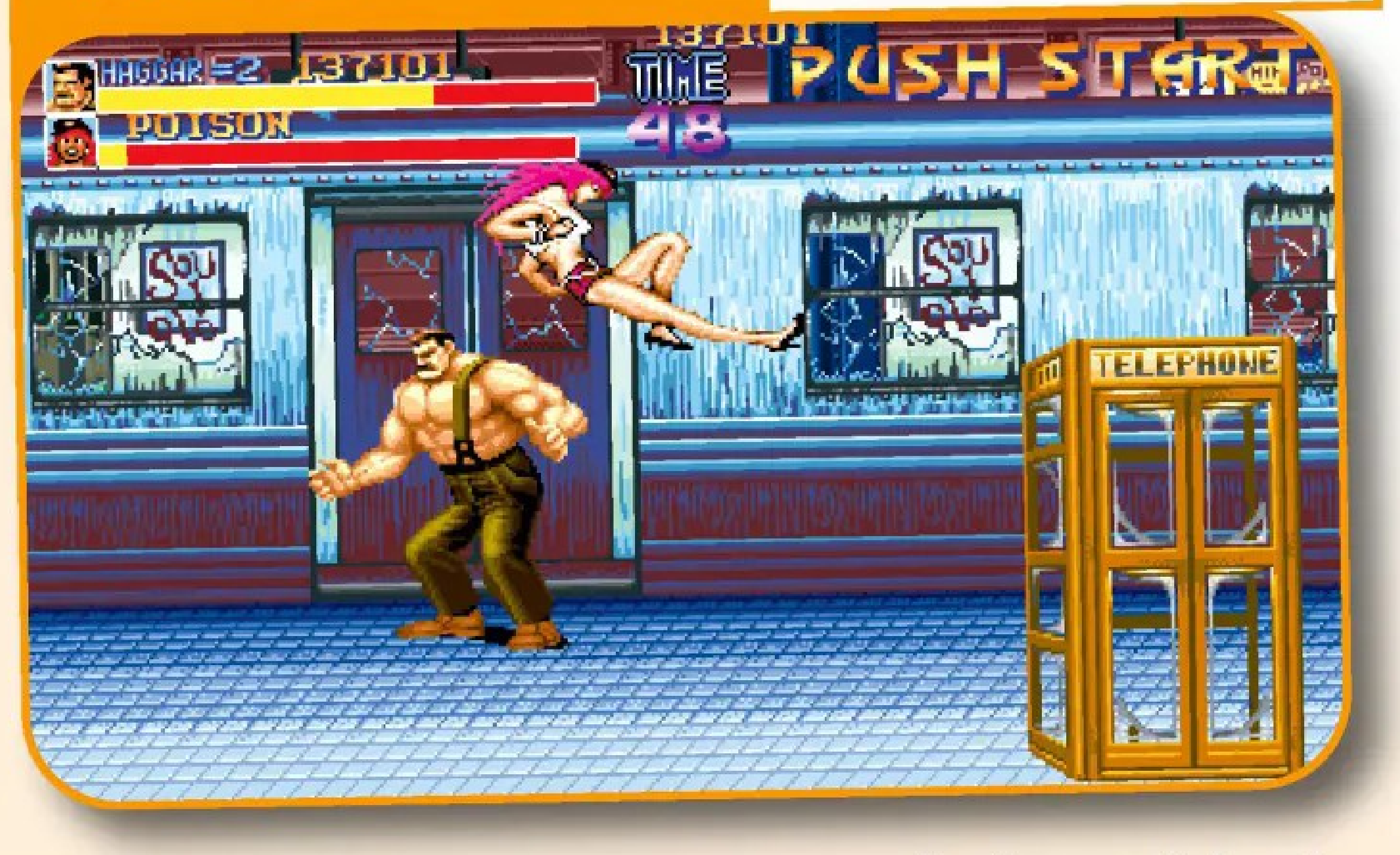


THE SLUMS:



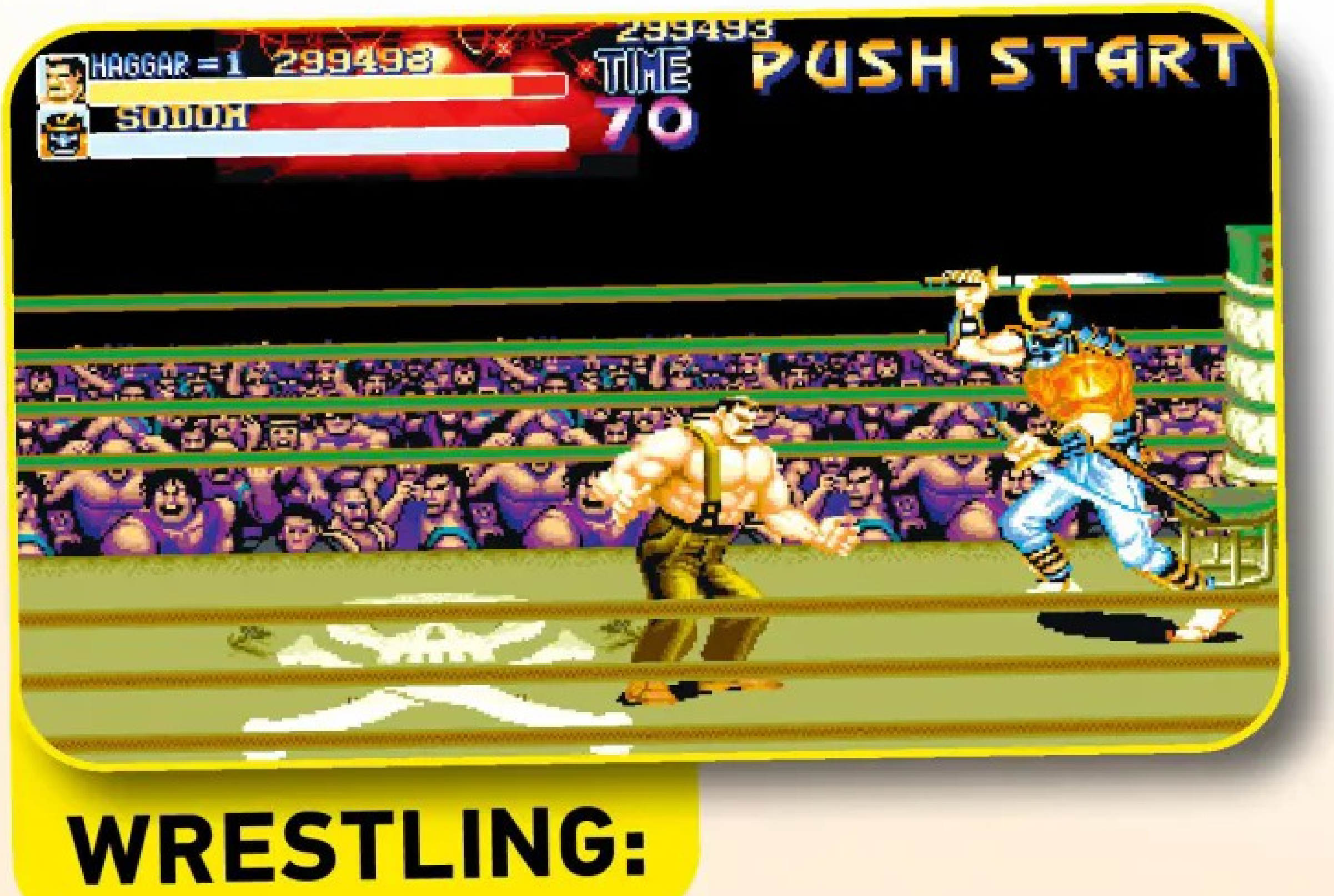
■ If you're looking for a great place to start your trip in Metro City, why not visit the world famous slums? As far as desolate hobbles of brick and mortar go, it doesn't get much better than this. There's plenty to discover: punch a couple of oil drums to death and see what apples or cooked meat you find.

THE SUBWAY:



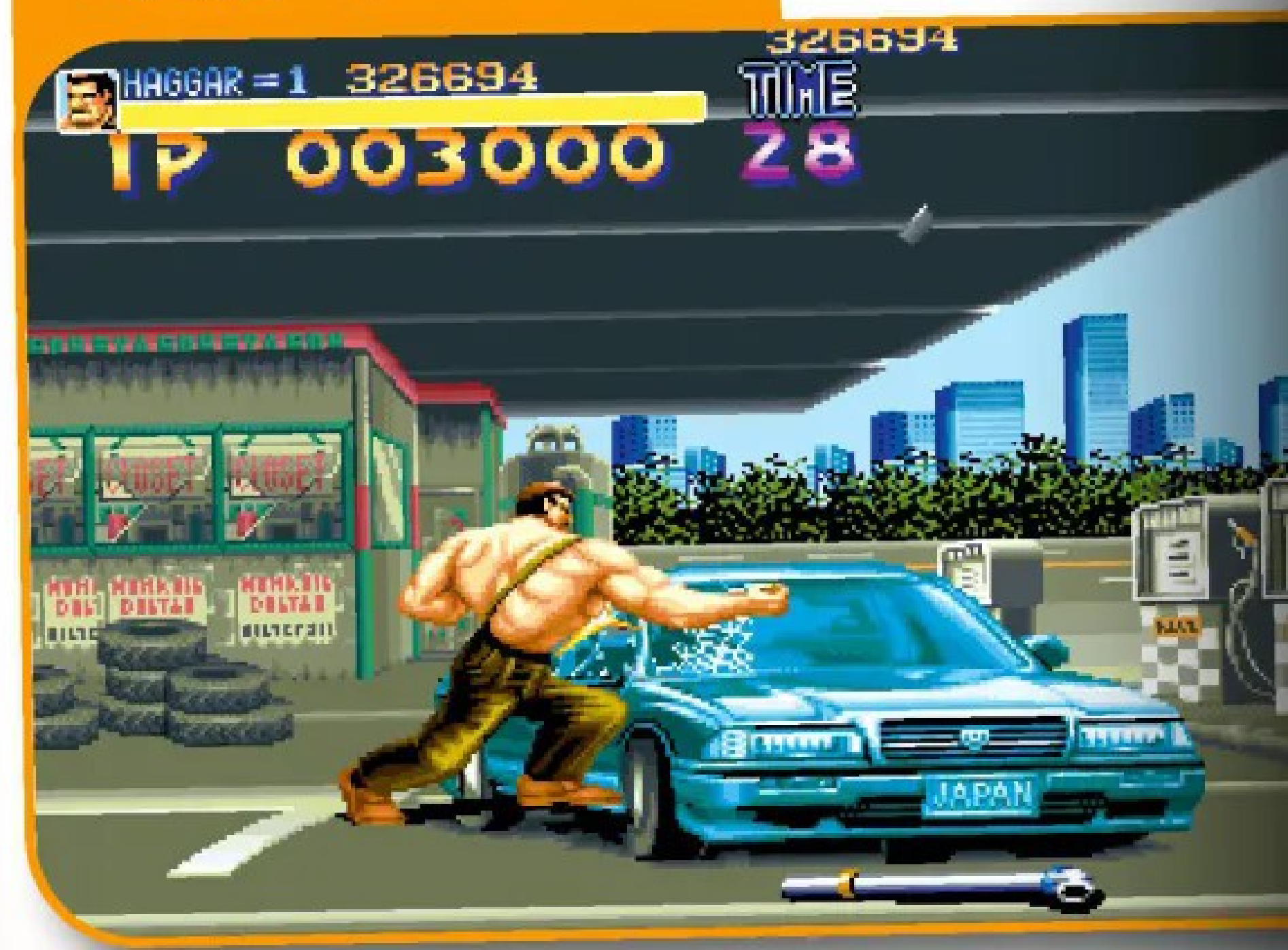
■ Metro City's subway system is the quickest and safest way to get around, and if you don't know where to go, don't panic, because help is at hand. You can ring any one of the helpful Metro City tour guides, such as Poison, whose phone number can be found scrawled in telephone boxes and toilets throughout town.

■ For a great night out, visit our brand new leisure complex and watch a no-holds-barred wrestling match… or even participate in one. Here's a shot of the mayor keeping up Metro City's international relations by wrestling the agriculture minister of some fictional city somewhere in Japan.

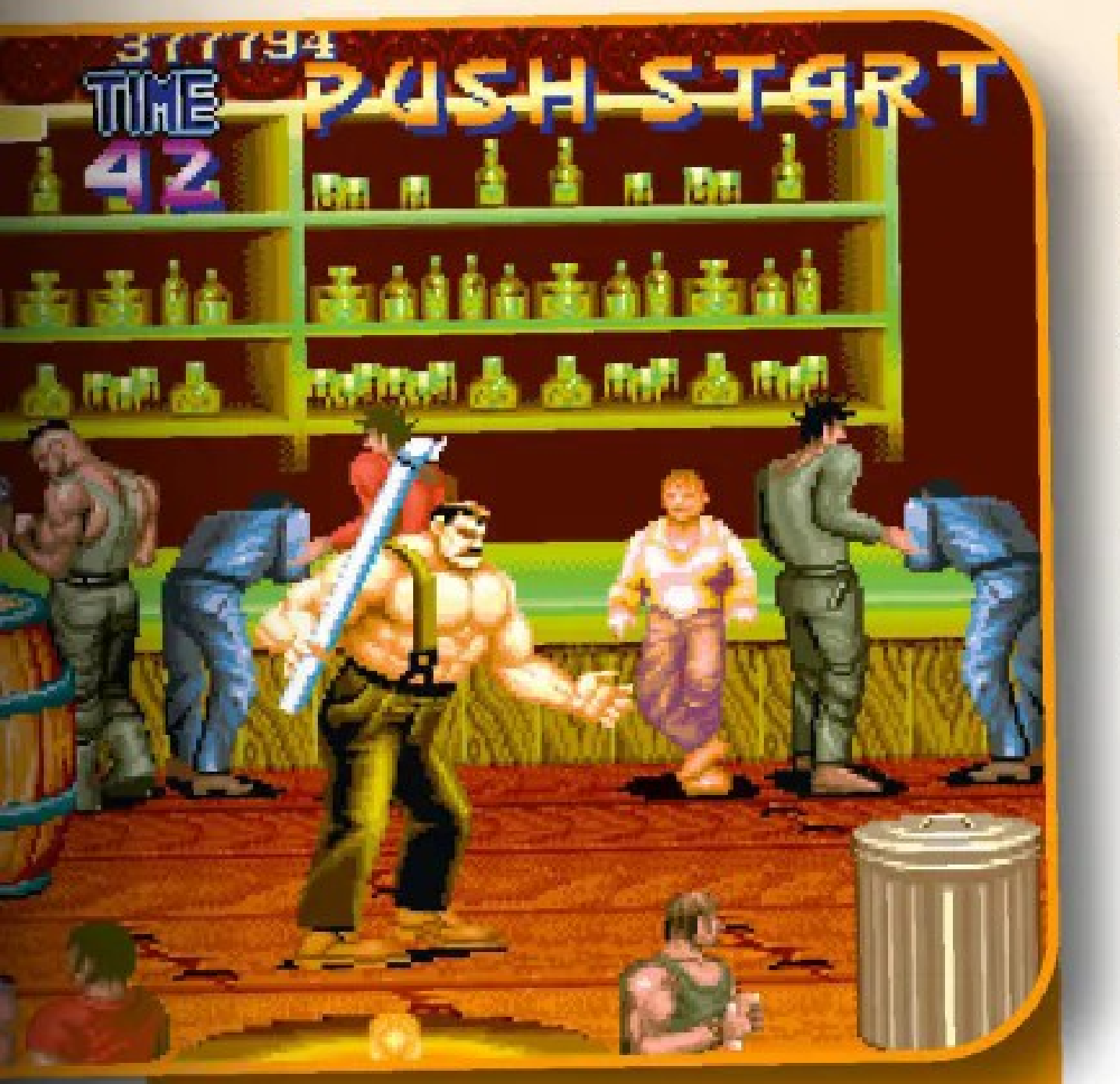


WRESTLING:

CAR WASH:



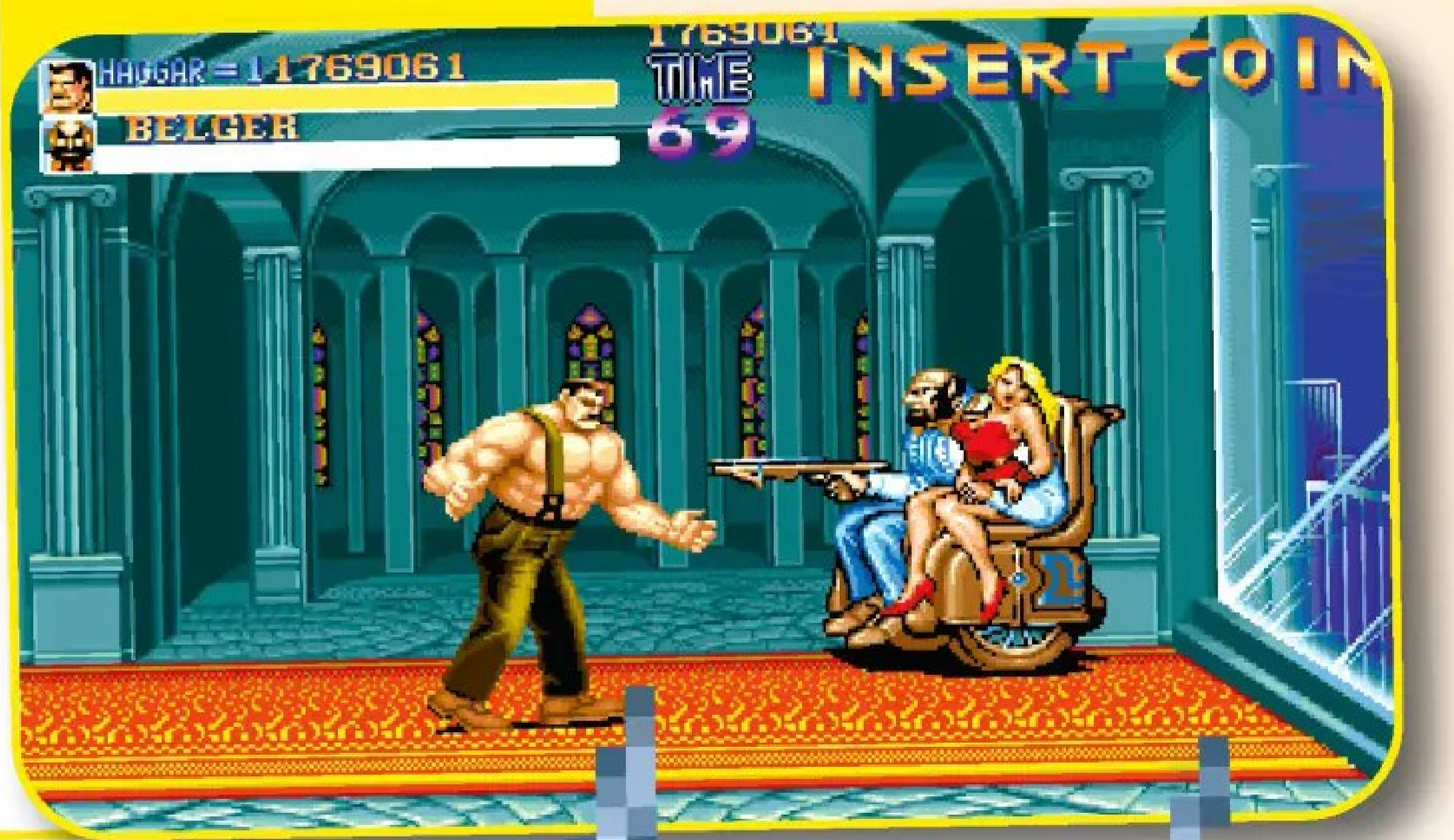
■ The mayor organised a sponsored car wash to raise money for a local school. It's just a shame he forgot to bring any water. Still, it's amazing what you can do with a spot of elbow grease and bit of lead pipe.


PUSH START
TIME
42

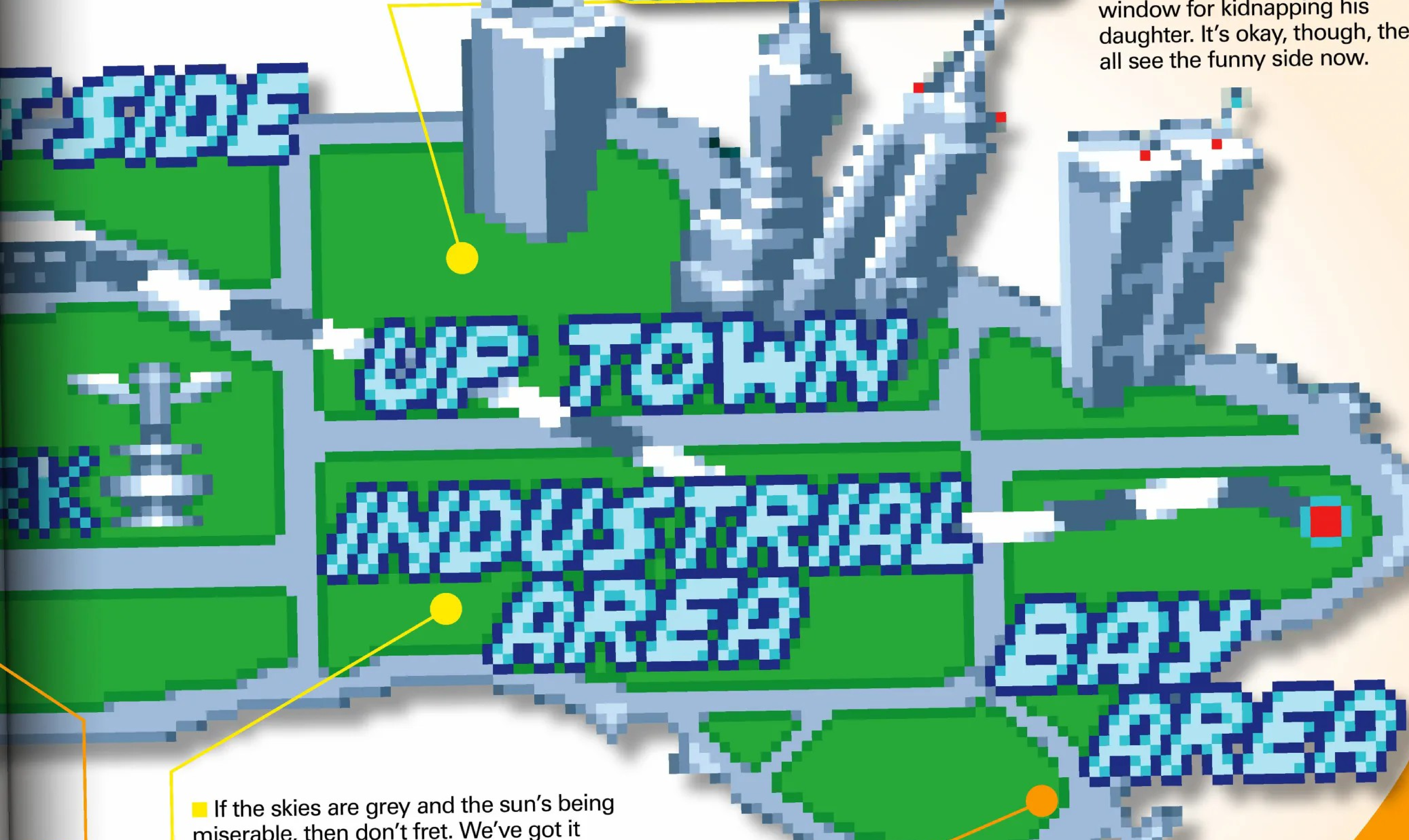
WEST SIDE:

If you fancy grabbing a bite to eat, you could do a lot worse than paying a visit to Metro City's delicious West Side district, home to plenty of fine eateries and cocktail bars. The NinNin bar is a firm favourite with locals and tourists, so stop by and order a giant cocktail and then consume it using the bar's famous oversized steel straws.

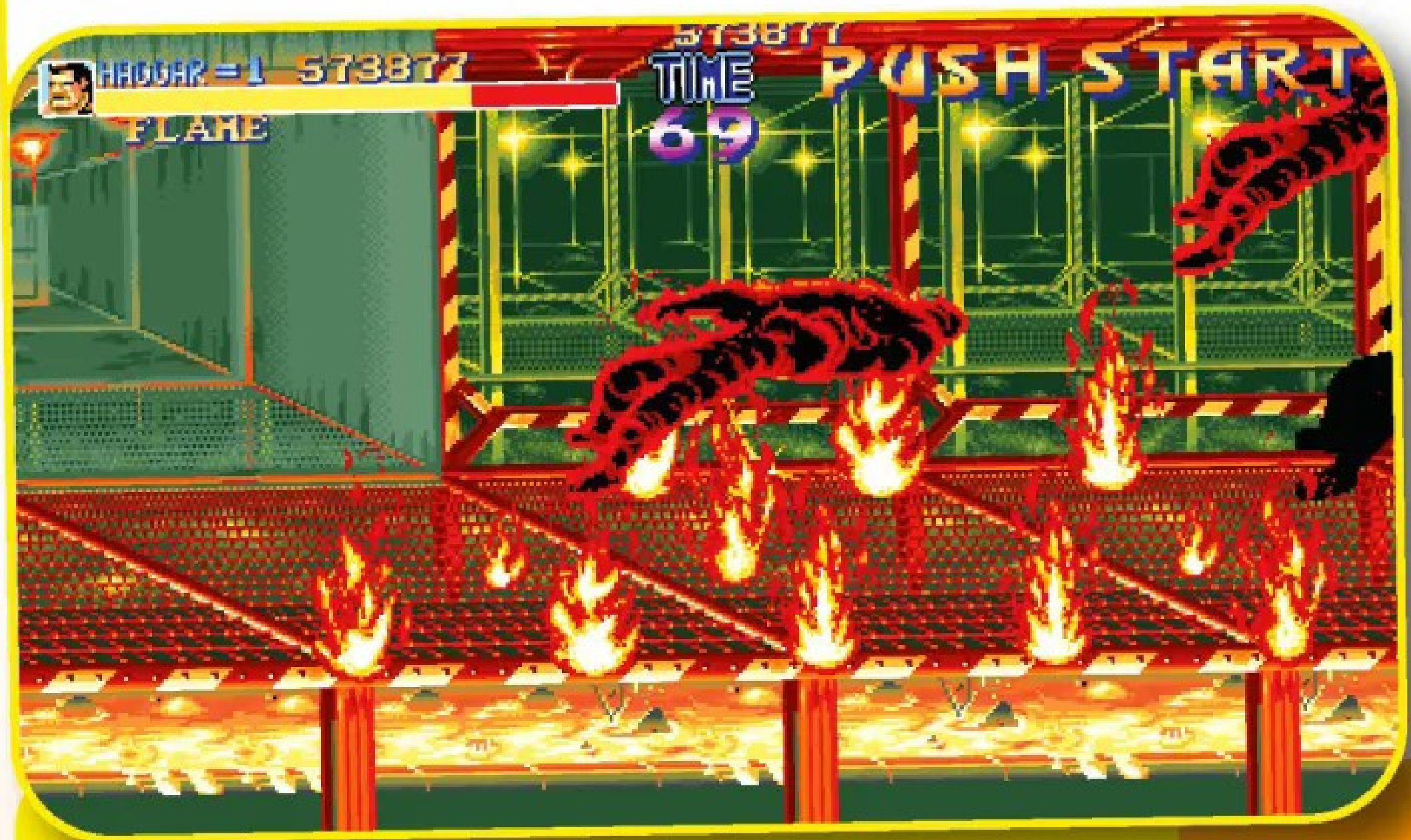
UP TOWN:


HAGGAR=1769061
BELGER
TIME
69
INSERT COIN

When the sun is shining there's no better place to relax in Metro City than in our new Up Town development. Here's the mayor making a fleeting visit to the city's retirement village. The mayor and Jessica have come to visit their old pal Belger, who was forced into a wheelchair after the mayor jokingly threw him out of a window for kidnapping his daughter. It's okay, though, they all see the funny side now.

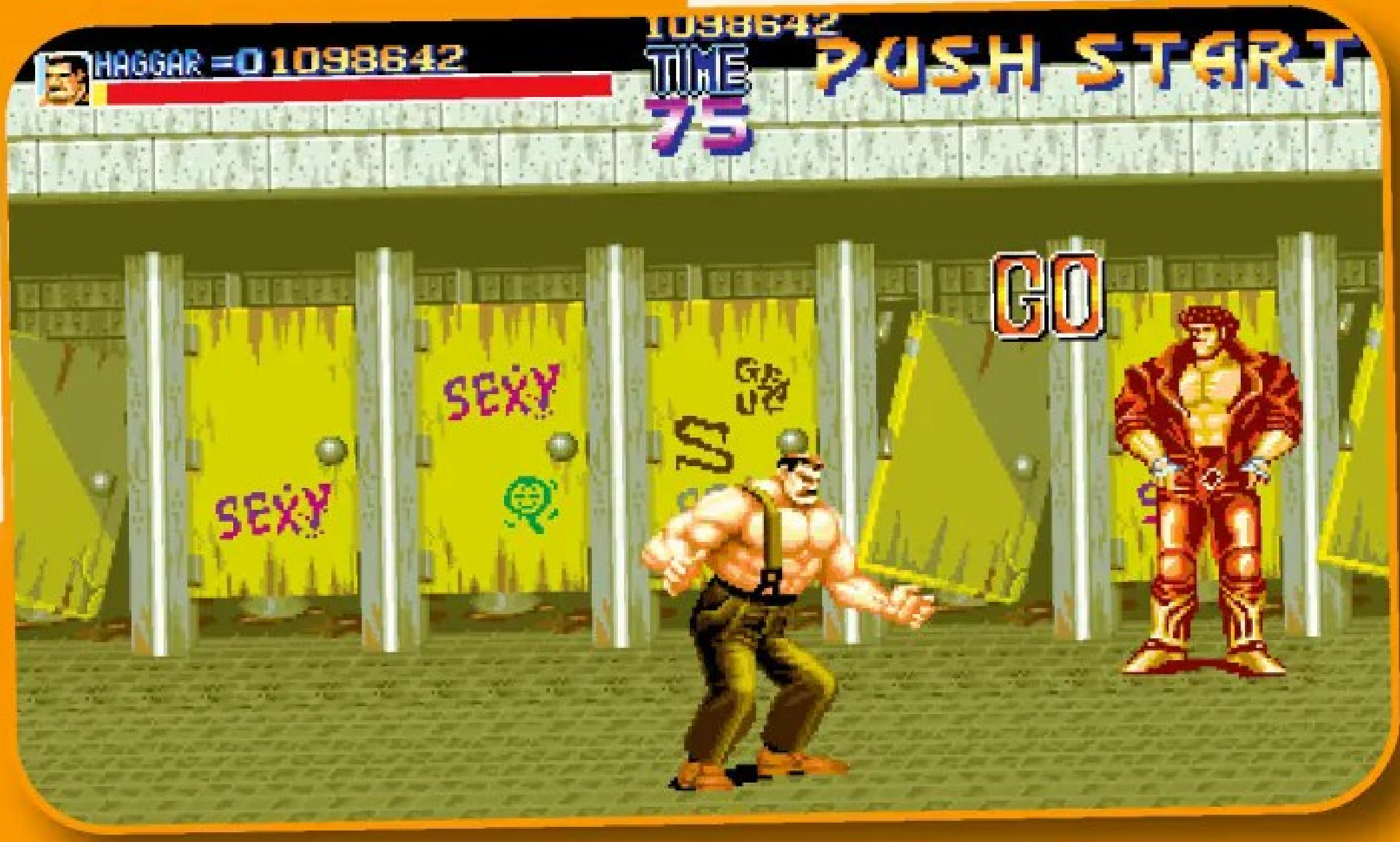

SIDE
UP TOWN
RK
INDUSTRIAL AREA
BAY AREA

If the skies are grey and the sun's being miserable, then don't fret. We've got it covered. To make sure you always leave Metro City with a beaming holiday tan, take a quick trip to Industrial City Gym – home to some of the most powerful tanning beds in the world.

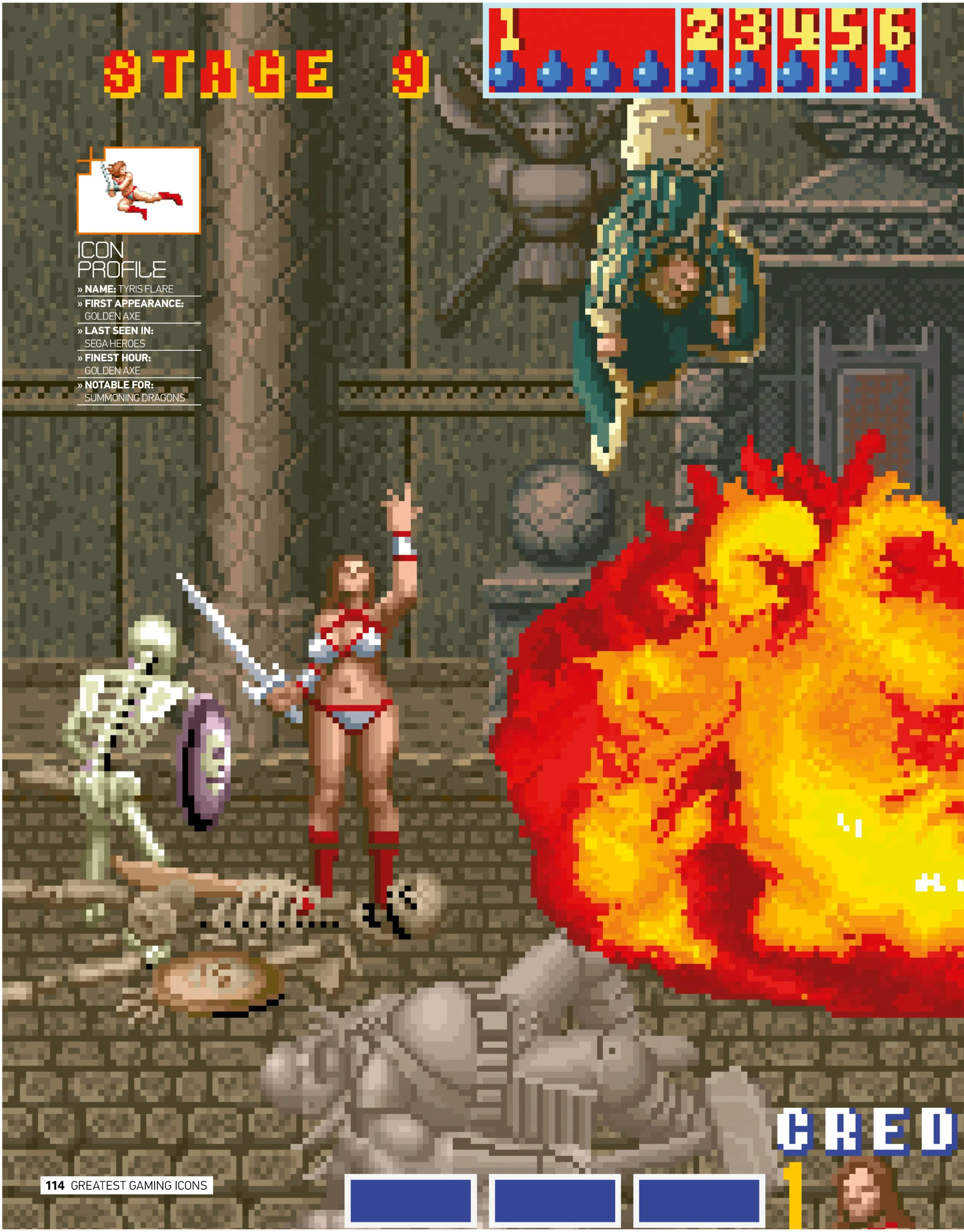

HAGGAR=1 573877
FLAME
TIME
69
PUSH START

INDUSTRIAL AREA:

BAY AREA:

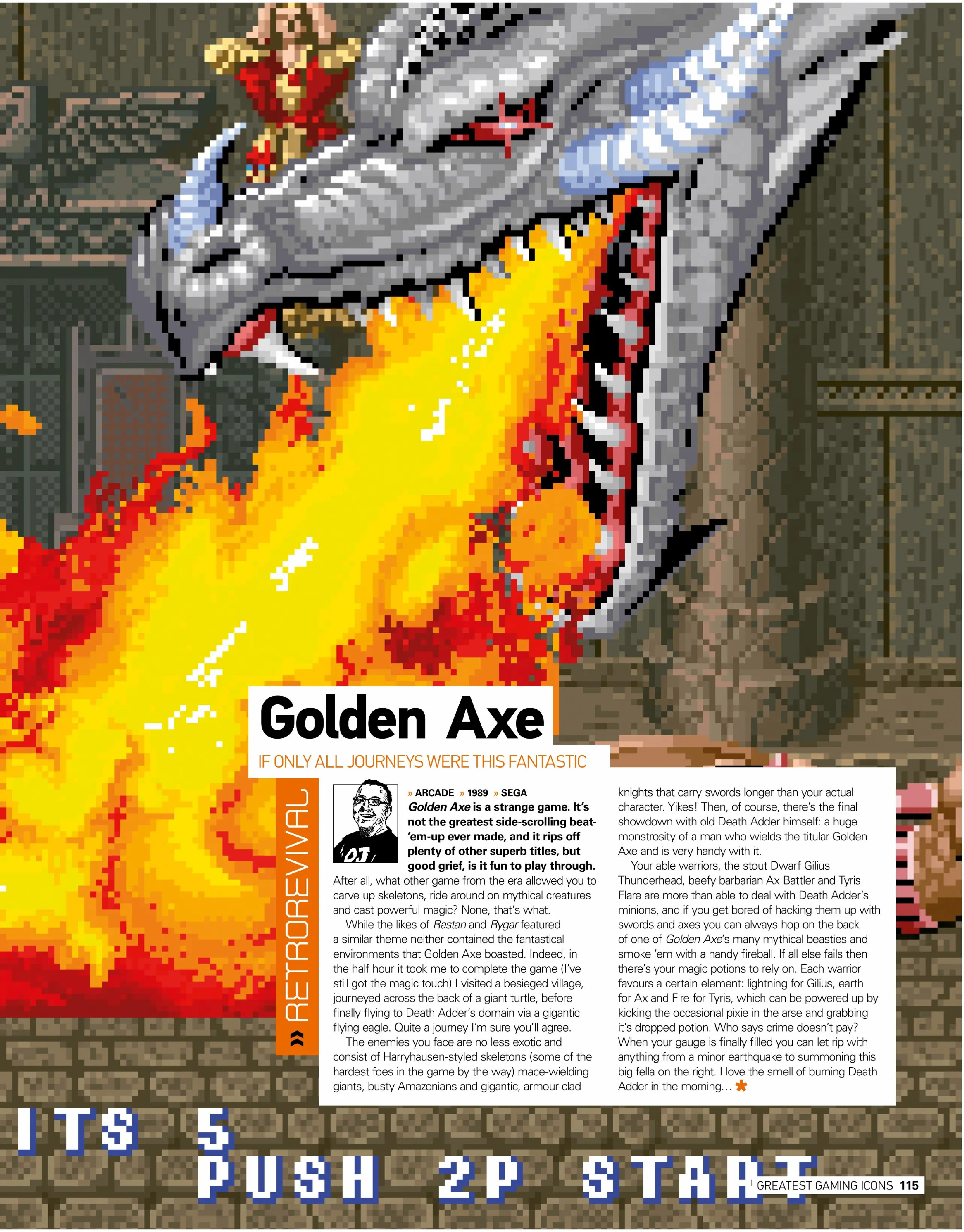

HAGGAR=01098642
TIME
75
PUSH START
GO
SEXY
SEXY

The public toilets are a great place to find approachable and outgoing people. This local biker is telling the mayor how nice he looks with his shirt missing. The mayor responds by explaining to the nice man how big the key to the city actually is.


STAGE 9
1
2
3
4
5
6
CRED
1

ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** TYRIS FLARE
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** GOLDEN AXE
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** SEGA HEROES
- **» FINEST HOUR:** GOLDEN AXE
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** SUMMONING DRAGONS



Golden Axe

IF ONLY ALL JOURNEYS WERE THIS FANTASTIC

» ARCADE » 1989 » SEGA

***Golden Axe* is a strange game. It's not the greatest side-scrolling beat-'em-up ever made, and it rips off plenty of other superb titles, but good grief, is it fun to play through.** After all, what other game from the era allowed you to carve up skeletons, ride around on mythical creatures and cast powerful magic? None, that's what.

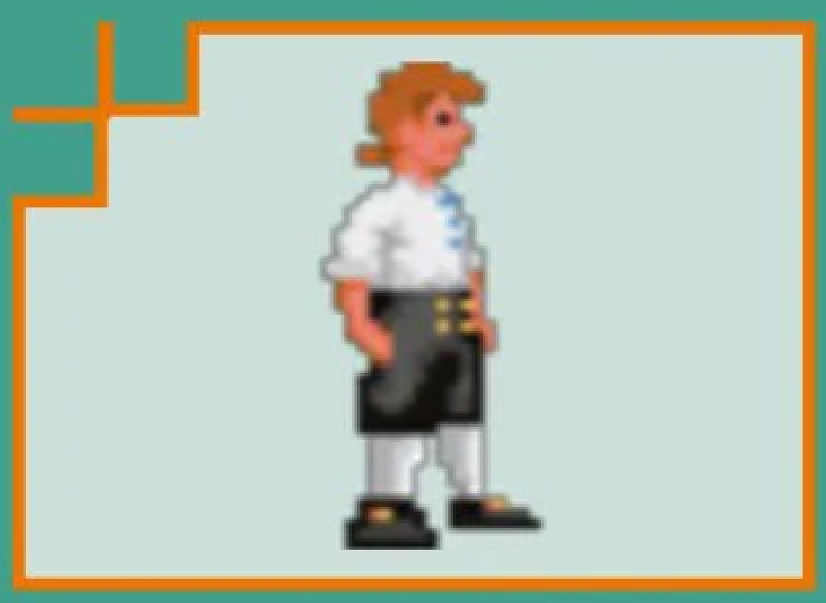
While the likes of *Rastan* and *Rygar* featured a similar theme neither contained the fantastical environments that Golden Axe boasted. Indeed, in the half hour it took me to complete the game (I've still got the magic touch) I visited a besieged village, journeyed across the back of a giant turtle, before finally flying to Death Adder's domain via a gigantic flying eagle. Quite a journey I'm sure you'll agree.

The enemies you face are no less exotic and consist of Harryhausen-styled skeletons (some of the hardest foes in the game by the way) mace-wielding giants, busty Amazonians and gigantic, armour-clad knights that carry swords longer than your actual character. Yikes! Then, of course, there's the final showdown with old Death Adder himself: a huge monstrosity of a man who wields the titular Golden Axe and is very handy with it.

Your able warriors, the stout Dwarf Gilius Thunderhead, beefy barbarian Ax Battler and Tyris Flare are more than able to deal with Death Adder's minions, and if you get bored of hacking them up with swords and axes you can always hop on the back of one of *Golden Axe*'s many mythical beasties and smoke 'em with a handy fireball. If all else fails then there's your magic potions to rely on. Each warrior favours a certain element: lightning for Gilius, earth for Ax and Fire for Tyris, which can be powered up by kicking the occasional pixie in the arse and grabbing it's dropped potion. Who says crime doesn't pay? When your gauge is finally filled you can let rip with anything from a minor earthquake to summoning this big fella on the right. I love the smell of burning Death Adder in the morning… ✱

GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD

All he wanted to be was a mighty pirate but this classic Nineties character ended up becoming so much more and earned a legion of fans



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** GUYBRUSH THREEPWOOD
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** TALES OF MONKEY ISLAND
- » **FINEST HOUR:** MONKEY ISLAND II: LECHUCK'S REVEBGE
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** PUN FIGHTING

When people look back on the early years of LucasArts, before *Star Wars* tie-ins were a prominent feature, they remember its range of classic adventure-game characters. Pushed for a favourite, many will pick Guybrush Threepwood, a wannabe pirate who unwittingly came up against the evil ghost pirate LeChuck. Guybrush's arrival on Melee Island in the first *Secret Of Monkey Island* title is shrouded in mystery; all we know is that he intends to become a 'mighty pirate'. Guybrush's journey to fulfil this dream forms the bulk of the first part of the game, where he must embark on the Three Trials involving treasure hunting, sword fighting, and stealing the Idol of Many Hands from the Governor, his future love interest Elaine Marley.

Guybrush's blocky, lo-res appearance is a result of hardware limitations, with only 16 colours at the developer's disposal and a small resolution of 320 x 200. Any fleshing out of his appearance is done in the form of close-up still screens, where his curly golden hair, blue eyes and boyish charm help convey his naive and somewhat innocent personality. His name, quite possibly the daftest to feature in a game, came about by accident, rather than design. The animation file was generically entitled 'Guy' while art package Deluxe Paint called a selected file a 'Brush', which resulted in the image being saved as 'Guybrush'. His surname, Threepwood, was picked from an internal company competition, with rival nemesis LeChuck named purely because general manager Steve Arnold wanted a character named Chuck in the game.

In the second game, Guybrush took on a different appearance, casting aside his raggy clothes in favour of a blue jacket, red boots and other finery as a result of his fame and fortune from defeating LeChuck. His hair's slightly darker and he even attempts to grow a beard, although, given its lack of visibility, it's more bum fluff than facial hair. Digs at his youthful demeanour despite being older suggest that beneath the visual changes he remains the same slightly inept goofy pirate wannabe with the fate of the world on his shoulders.

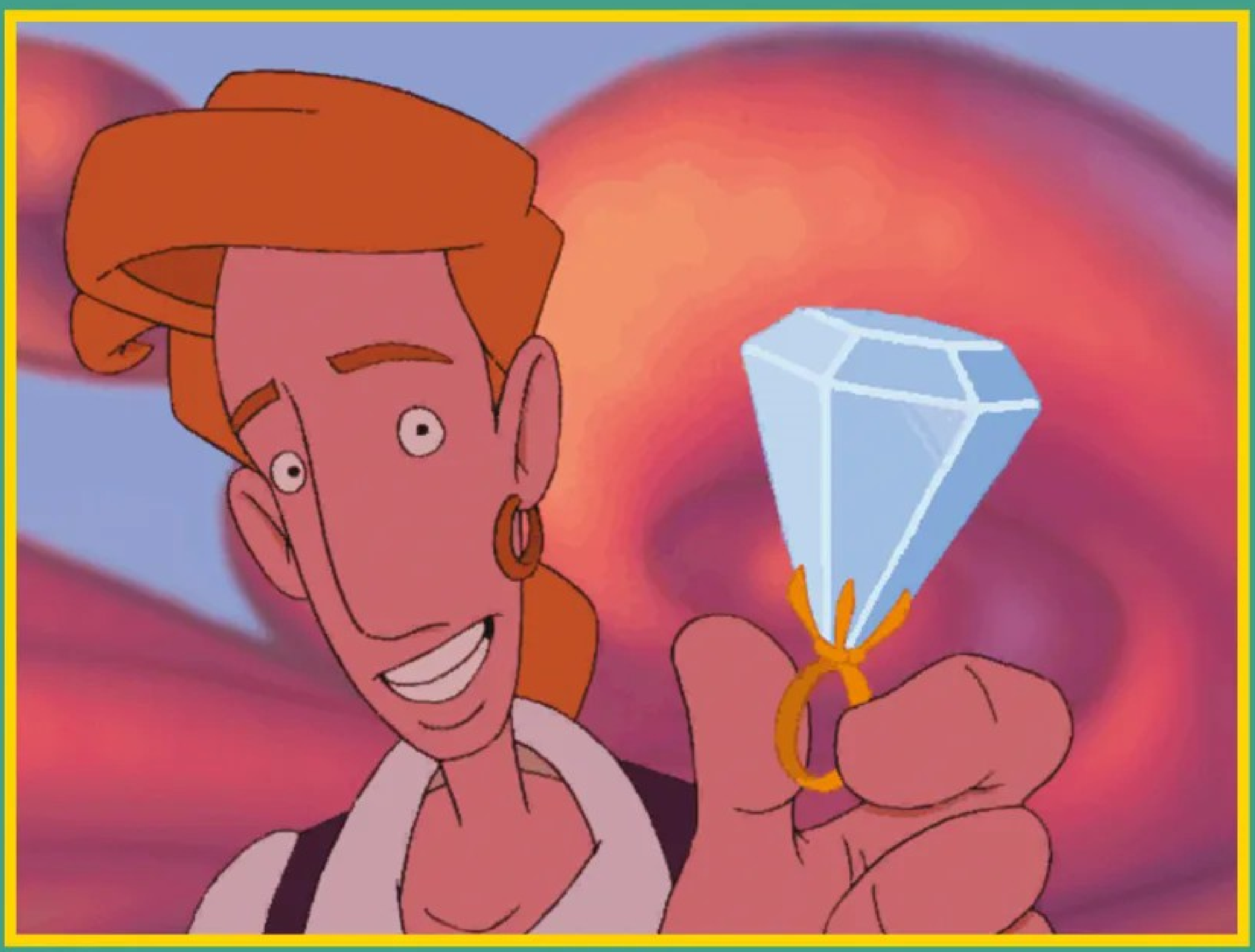
With different designers behind the creation of *Curse Of Monkey Island* – Ron Gilbert having left LucasArts in favour of warmer climes at his new company Humongous Entertainment – Guybrush took on a modern look that went back to the series' roots. It was also the first *Monkey Island* to give Guybrush a voice. And while the sound of characters rarely reach expectations, Dominic Armato did a good job of portraying his witty, slightly clueless personality. One noticeable change was in his relationship with Elaine Marley, who he proposes to very early on, in stark contrast to the occasion when he played with her emotions in *Monkey Island 2* to get his hands on a piece of treasure map.

Escape From Monkey Island, retained his visual appearance, this time remodelled into the world of 3D. This jump to three dimensions stripped the character models of their vibrant charm encountered in the last three games, and while Dominic Armato once again reprises the role of Guybrush, the lacklustre script means that his personality never gets the chance to shine. Returning from honeymoon with Elaine Marley, Guybrush comes across as a hen-pecked husband, never really standing out in his own right as in previous escapades. By this point the popularity of PC adventure titles had already gone downhill, with many gamers turning to RPGs and consoles for their fix.

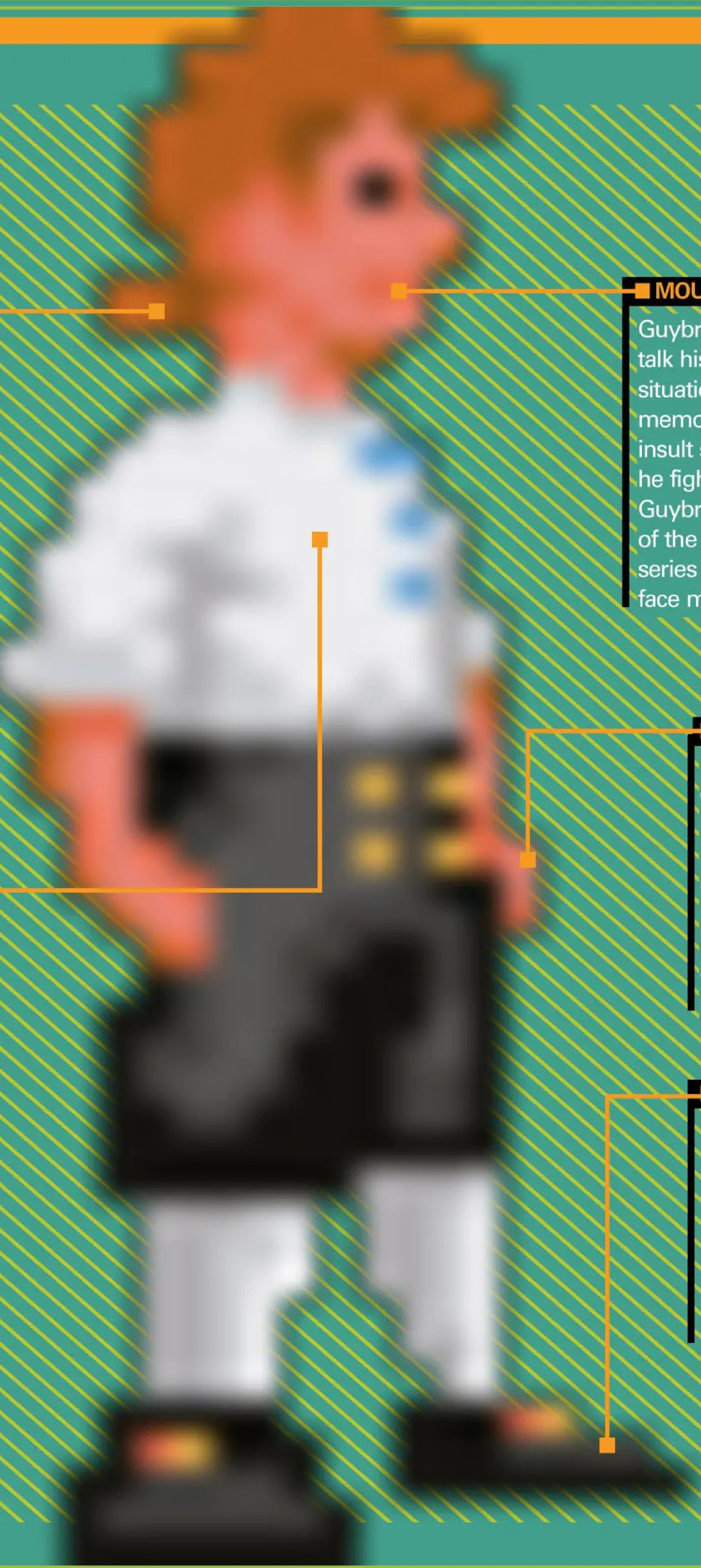
When it looked like we'd never get another Guybrush adventure, he returned for Telltale Games' episodic series, *Tales Of Monkey Island*, proving he still had plenty of fans.

> **"His name, possible the daftest to feature in a game, came about by accident, rather than design"**

Although he may have started off as a few pixels, Guybrush Threepwood's influence on the adventure game scene cannot be underestimated. Future adventures from other companies had striking similarities to the character – Gilbert Goodmate is a Guybrush clone and pirate lead Jack Keane bears more than a passing resemblance to *Monkey Island*'s star – while the SCUMM interface paved the way for many others including *Flight Of The Amazon Queen*, the *Simon The Sorcerer* series and *Ankh*. The sixth *Monkey Island* may never see the light of day, but Guybrush's influence lives on in the internet scene, where fans continue to recreate his classic adventures. ★



» How could you not fail to fall in love with the fella?



HAIR

Guybrush's golden locks take on slightly different forms throughout the games, starting off as blond and curly, becoming darker for his second outing and then blond and flowing in the third game. His quiff-like style of the last game reflects his status as the husband of Governor Marley.

CHEST

The choice of simple black-and-white clothing in the first game is a result of hardware limitations, where only 16 colours could be used. While the second game saw Guybrush wearing more colourful garments, the following two revert back to the original black-and-white setup.

MOUTH

Guybrush will have to talk his way out of many situations, one of the most memorable being that of insult sword fighting. As he fights pirate after pirate, Guybrush will learn some of the wittiest lines in the series that will equip him to face more formidable foes.

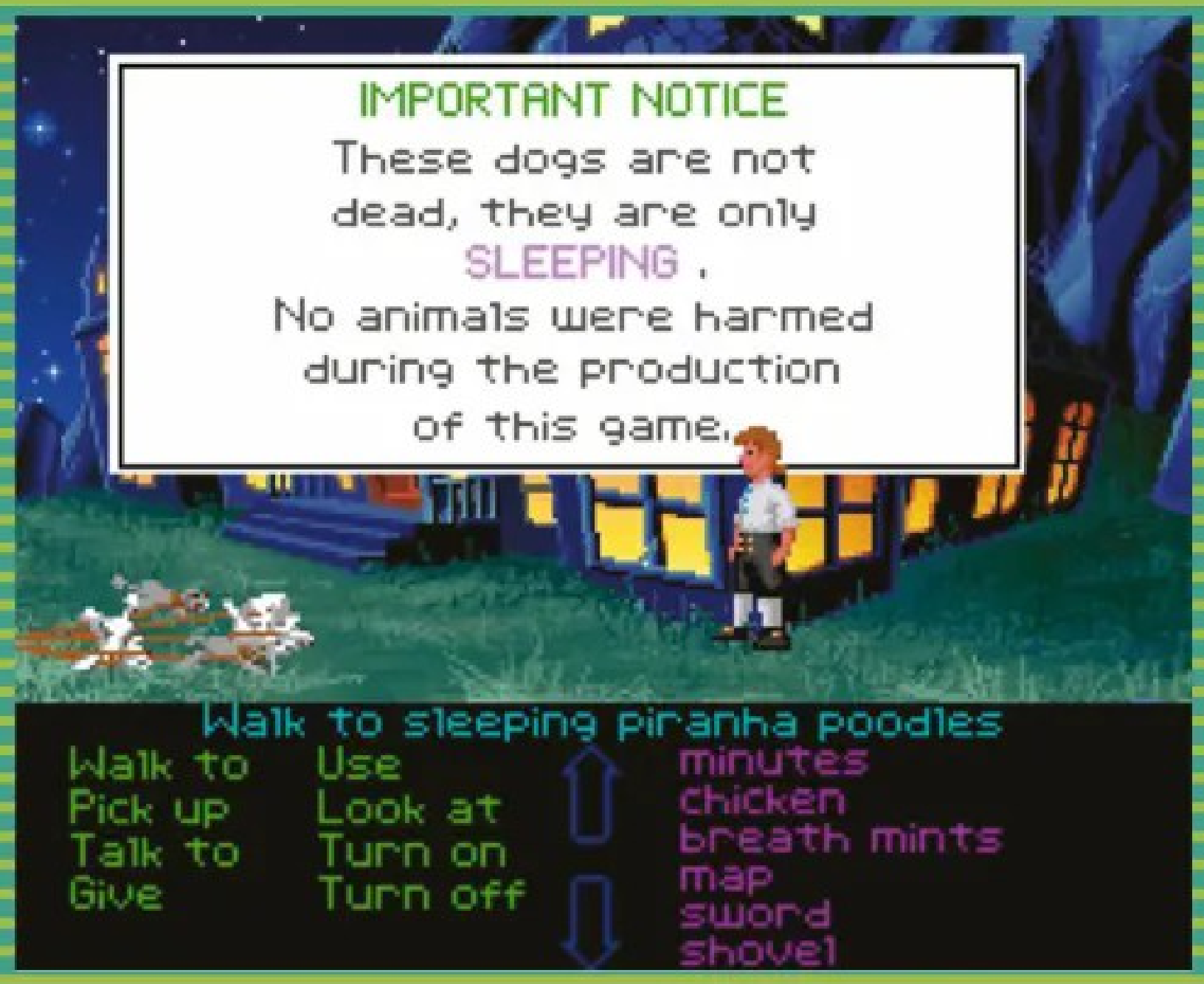
HAND

Like many adventure games, collecting objects is a key part of the adventure, and Guybrush will have to fetch an assortment of items, from rubber chickens with a pulley in the middle to mugs of grog, and in a later game, a banjo fit for a duel.

BOOTS

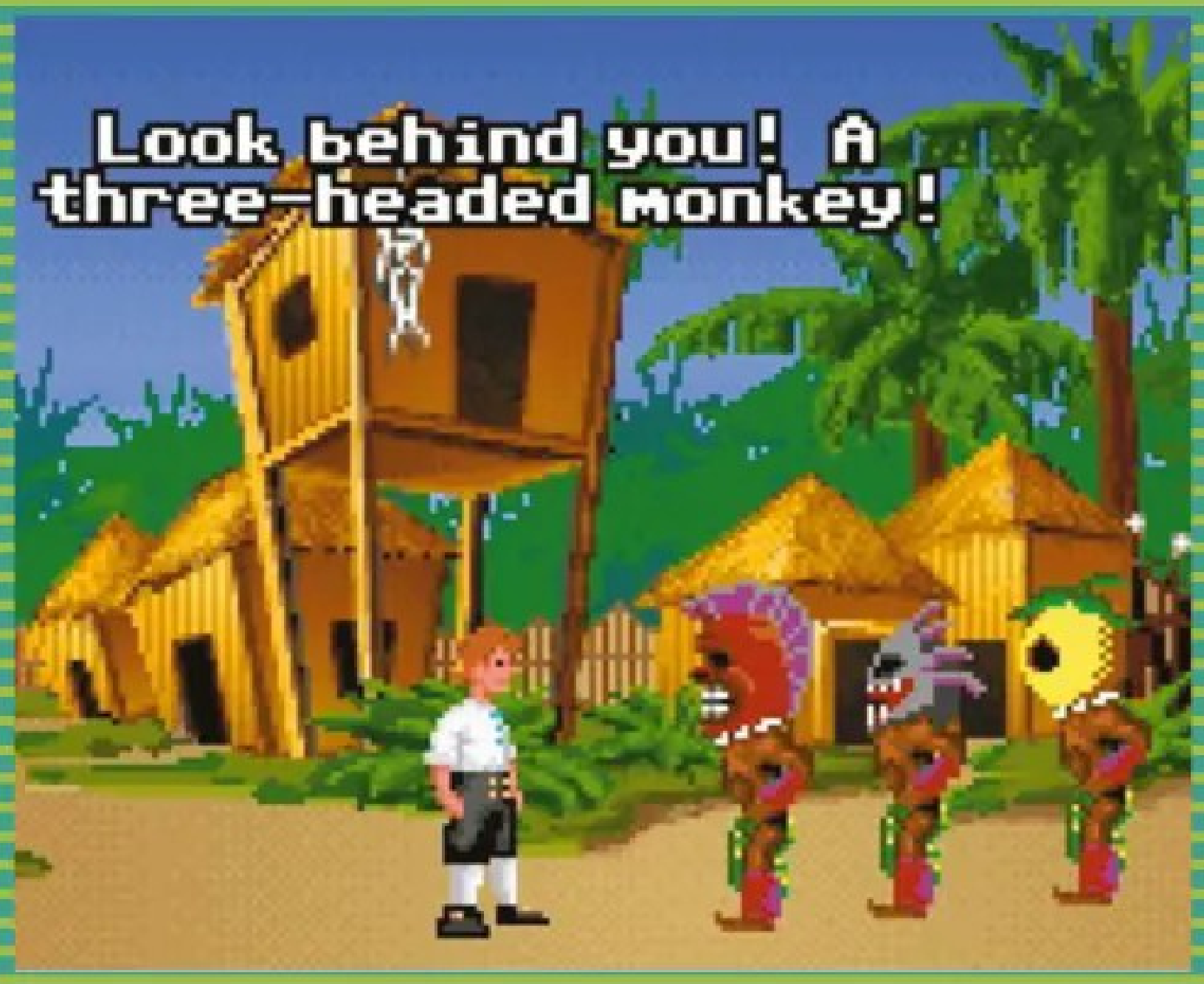
While his boots will change colour in each game to reflect his economic status, they enable Guybrush to do a lot of walking, whether it's exploring forests, travelling across the respective islands or delivering items to important characters.

> MAGIC MOMENTS



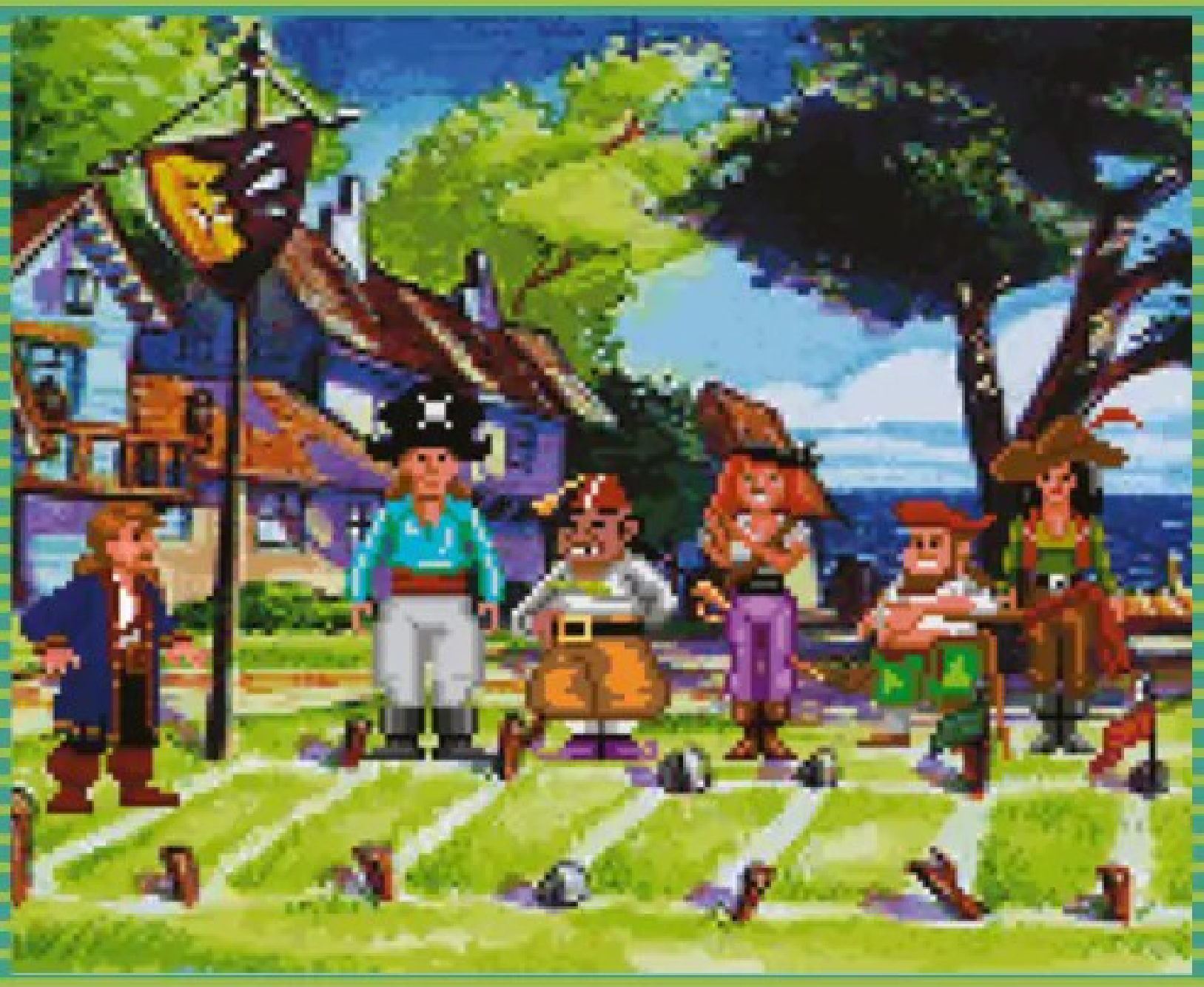
IMPORTANT NOTICE
These dogs are not
dead, they are only
SLEEPING .
No animals were harmed
during the production
of this game.

■ Poisoning poodles to get into the mansion is at least done in a friendly way.

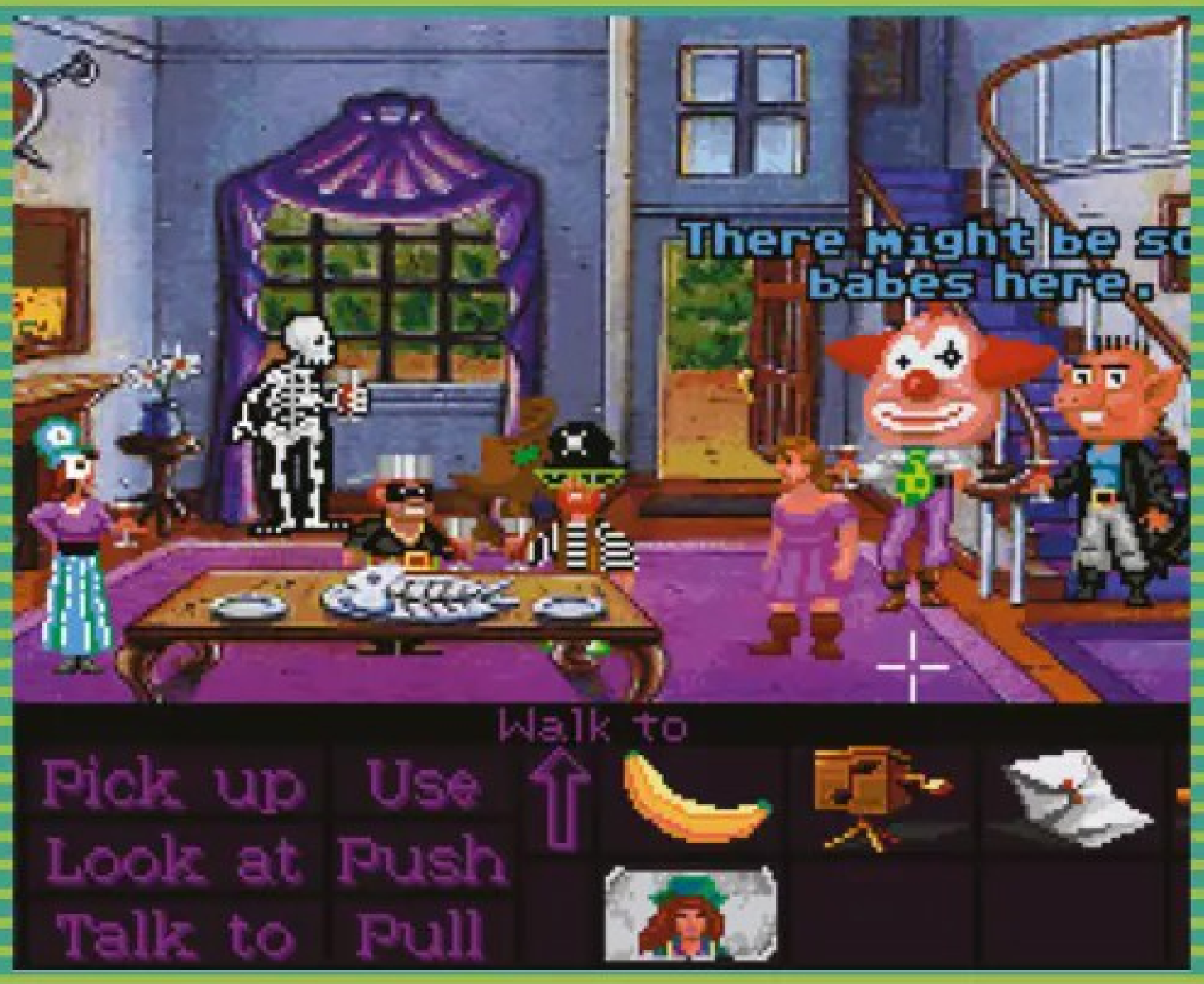


Look behind you! A
three-headed monkey!

■ Guybrush tries out some distraction tactics on the cannibals, but ultimately fails.



■ Guybrush embarks in a spitting competition fit for the mightiest pirate.



There might be so
babes here.

■ To gatecrash a party, Guybrush gets into the spirit of things with a pink dress. Suits you, sir.

LEMMINGS

Lemmings is the most popular British videogame of all time. At one point the world was overrun with the fragile little rodents

ICON PROFILE

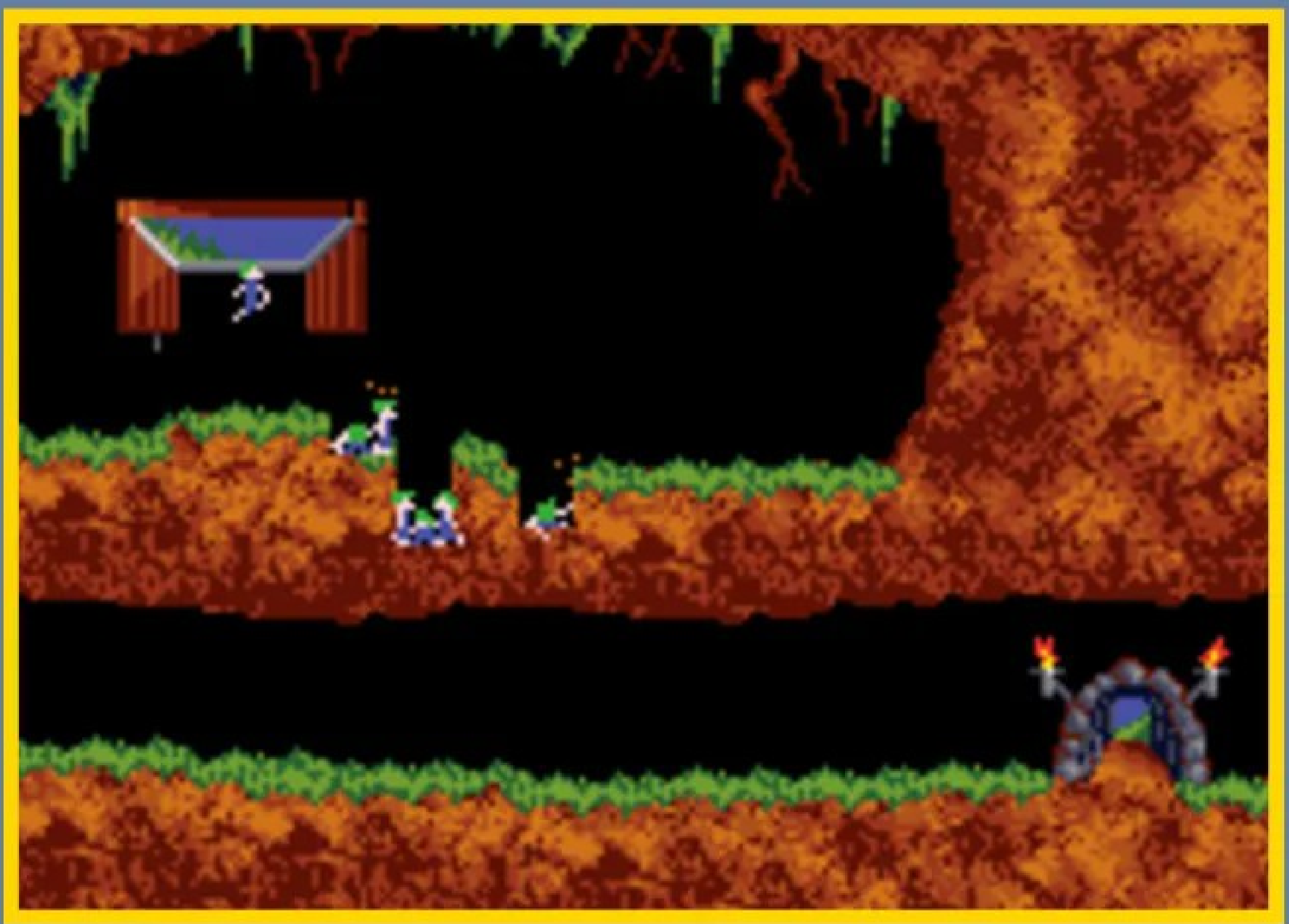
- » **NAME:** LEMMING
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** LEMMINGS
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** LEMMINGS: THE OFFICIAL GAME
- » **FINEST HOUR:** LEMMINGS
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** DYING

If you're a gamer above a certain age, you will have played *Lemmings*. The green-haired nightgown-wearing critters pretty much dominated the videogame industry back in the early-Nineties, resulting in blanket multiformat conversions, a planned arcade game by Data East that would sadly never see the light of day, and even a CD single that somehow reached number 51 in the UK charts. It was rubbish, by the way. It's clear why *Lemmings* was so popular: it was innovative, simple to grasp, addictive and starred a cast of likeable, hardworking rodents. However, the entire ethos of the game – the understanding that Lemmings offer themselves to their little Lemming God when the time comes for them to migrate – is less clear. This peculiar notion charts back to the 16th Century but was famously brought back to the fore by Walt Disney in 1958 thanks to the studio's peculiar and award-winning education video White Wilderness.

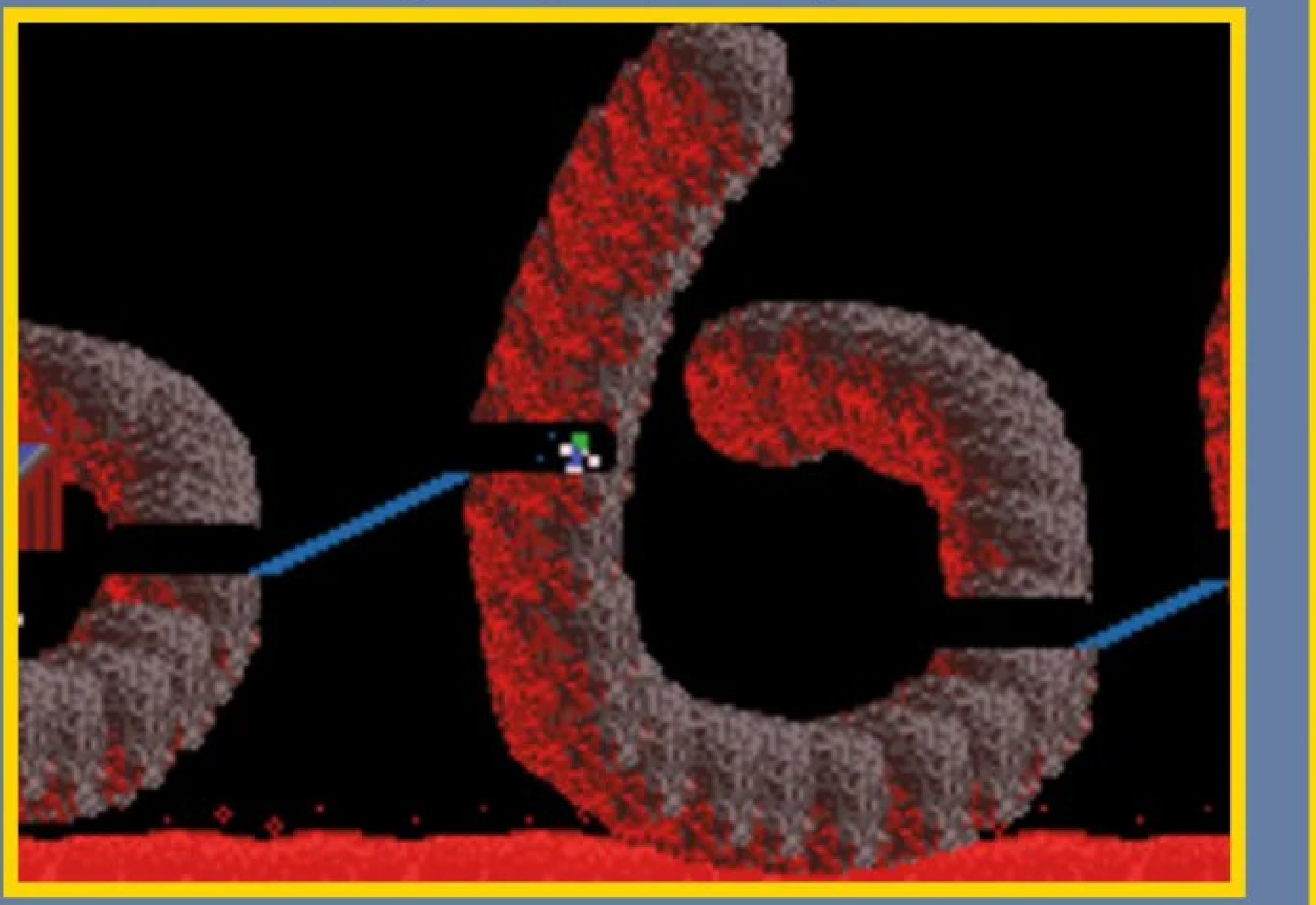
In the video, Walt introduces the grey squiggly fur-balls and shows us rare footage of them flopping themselves off high cliffs in Alberta, Canada, during migrating season. This footage is 'rare' because, in reality, living among lemmings aren't tribes of camouflaged cameramen trying to keep lemming numbers down by spinning the herbivores on turntables until they become inebriated and unwittingly fall to their doom. Yes, rumour has it that the crew were so desperate to catch what they thought was an actual lemming migration on camera, they took it upon themselves to stage a horrifying three-minute lemmings snuff-movie by spinning the critters around on record players. Perhaps even more bizarre is the fact that the footage apparently took the filmmakers three years to make. We can only suspect that 1,094 days of those three years were probably spent pointing lenses at cliff faces and scratching baffled heads. But regardless, it was this idea that sparked the inspiration for one of the most successful videogames of all time.

Like its credulous heroes, *Lemmings* began life small, simple, and somewhat scruffy. It was 1989 at the DMA offices in Scotland when, during the development of the game *Walker*, a challenge was laid down that a moving character couldn't be created inside an 8x8 pixel box. Programmer Mike Dailly took up the task and, in a single lunch break, quickly mocked up a set of walking sprites that conformed to the audacious criterion. The walk sequence ooking sprites were deftly plonked inside suitably minimalist environments, allowing them not to feel overshadowed. And the lemmings' wild tousled wafts of green hair provided a subtle beacon, making it easy to keep tabs on their numbers, against their dangerous and dark surroundings.

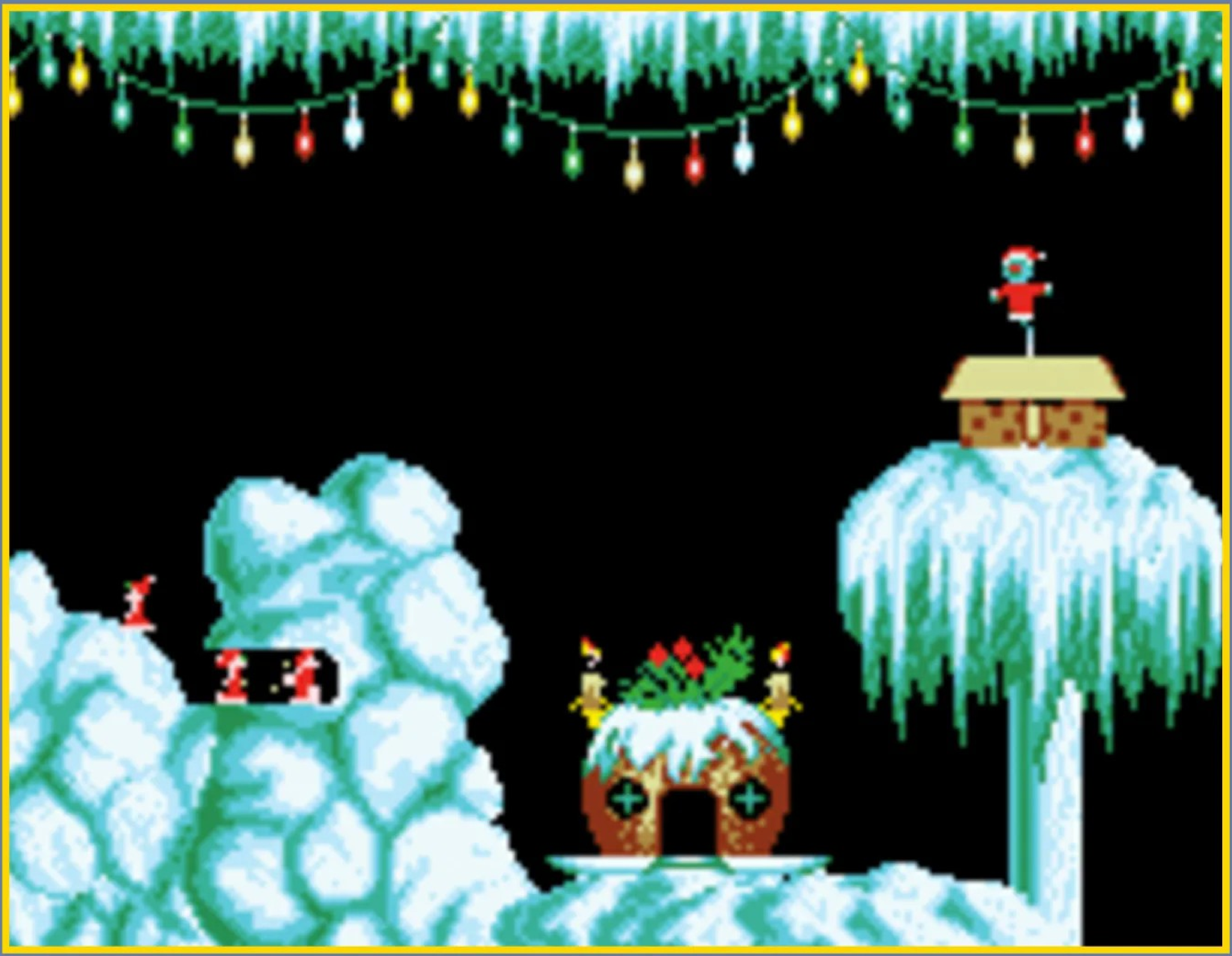
With eight jobs to dole out to your chosen lemming, effortlessly assigned using the game's deft and intuitive mouse controls, the trick to saving your tribe required both logic and planning. Rarely is repetition in a videogame enjoyable, and we'll be the first to admit that *Lemmings*' trial-and-error gameplay could often prove deeply testing at times – especially on the Mayhem skill level, but the game was also greatly rewarding and feverously addictive. Its finely tuned difficulty curve was spot on, and few games can boast such a smooth difficulty curve as *Lemmings*. Like a brainteaser you've been poring over but are gradually chipping away at with every turn, seeing your final lemming find his small patch of solace always brings a huge sense of accomplishment. That brain teasing continues to this day, thanks to Sony recently releasing the cute little critters on mobile devices. Let's go! ✱



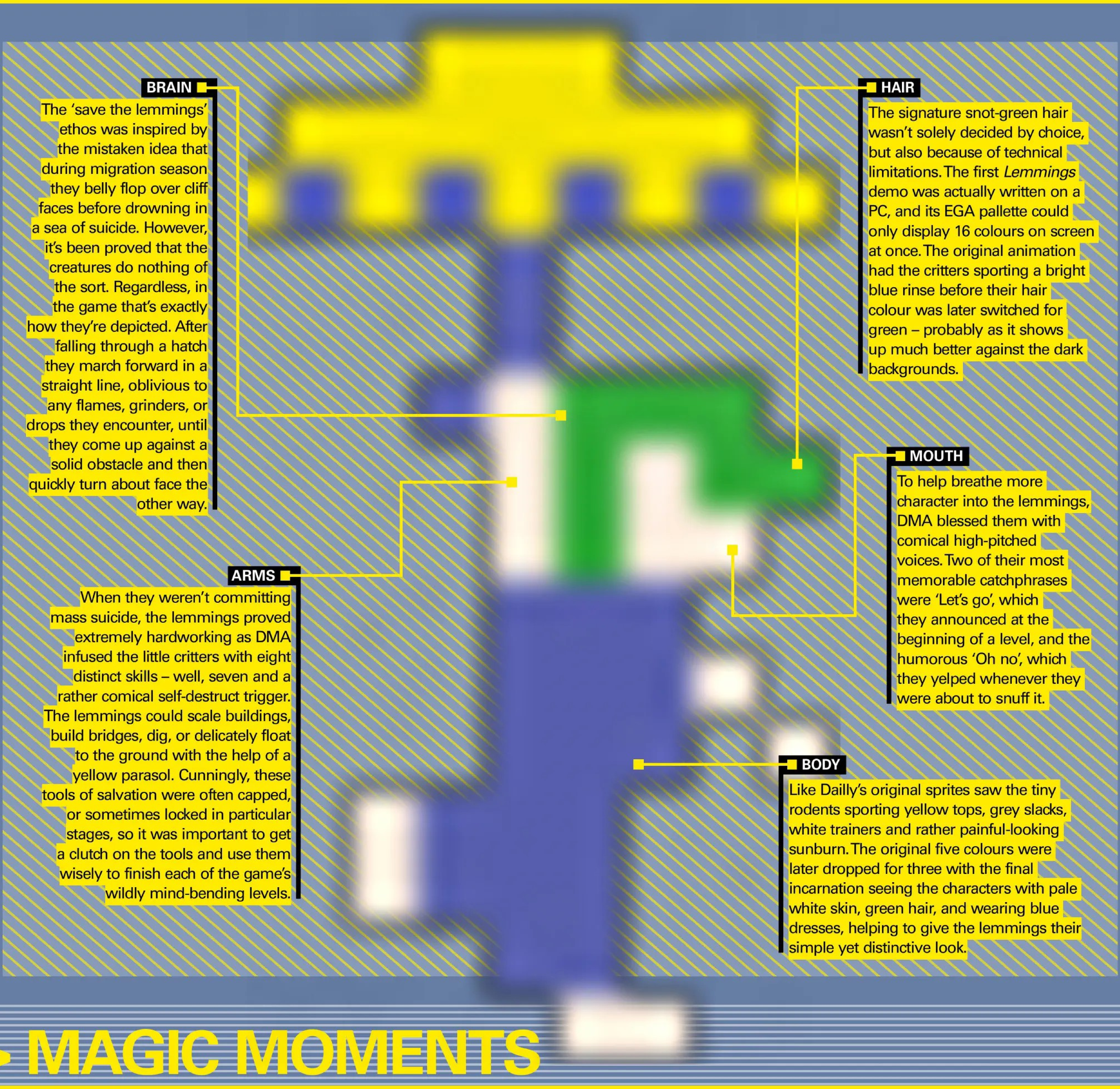
The first level in *Lemmings* is simple to grasp and even easier to crack. Be warned, they start getting a lot tougher.



Mike says this devilish stage was meant to be All The Fives, but finishing it proved too difficult.



The lemmings get festive thanks to some snowmen, bunting, and even little bobble hats.



BRAIN

The 'save the lemmings' ethos was inspired by the mistaken idea that during migration season they belly flop over cliff faces before drowning in a sea of suicide. However, it's been proved that the creatures do nothing of the sort. Regardless, in the game that's exactly how they're depicted. After falling through a hatch they march forward in a straight line, oblivious to any flames, grinders, or drops they encounter, until they come up against a solid obstacle and then quickly turn about face the other way.

HAIR

The signature snot-green hair wasn't solely decided by choice, but also because of technical limitations. The first *Lemmings* demo was actually written on a PC, and its EGA pallette could only display 16 colours on screen at once. The original animation had the critters sporting a bright blue rinse before their hair colour was later switched for green – probably as it shows up much better against the dark backgrounds.

MOUTH

To help breathe more character into the lemmings, DMA blessed them with comical high-pitched voices. Two of their most memorable catchphrases were 'Let's go', which they announced at the beginning of a level, and the humorous 'Oh no', which they yelped whenever they were about to snuff it.

ARMS

When they weren't committing mass suicide, the lemmings proved extremely hardworking as DMA infused the little critters with eight distinct skills – well, seven and a rather comical self-destruct trigger. The lemmings could scale buildings, build bridges, dig, or delicately float to the ground with the help of a yellow parasol. Cunningly, these tools of salvation were often capped, or sometimes locked in particular stages, so it was important to get a clutch on the tools and use them wisely to finish each of the game's wildly mind-bending levels.

BODY

Like Dailly's original sprites saw the tiny rodents sporting yellow tops, grey slacks, white trainers and rather painful-looking sunburn. The original five colours were later dropped for three with the final incarnation seeing the characters with pale white skin, green hair, and wearing blue dresses, helping to give the lemmings their simple yet distinctive look.

> MAGIC MOMENTS

The last stage finds the little scamps split up and with one final mountain to climb.

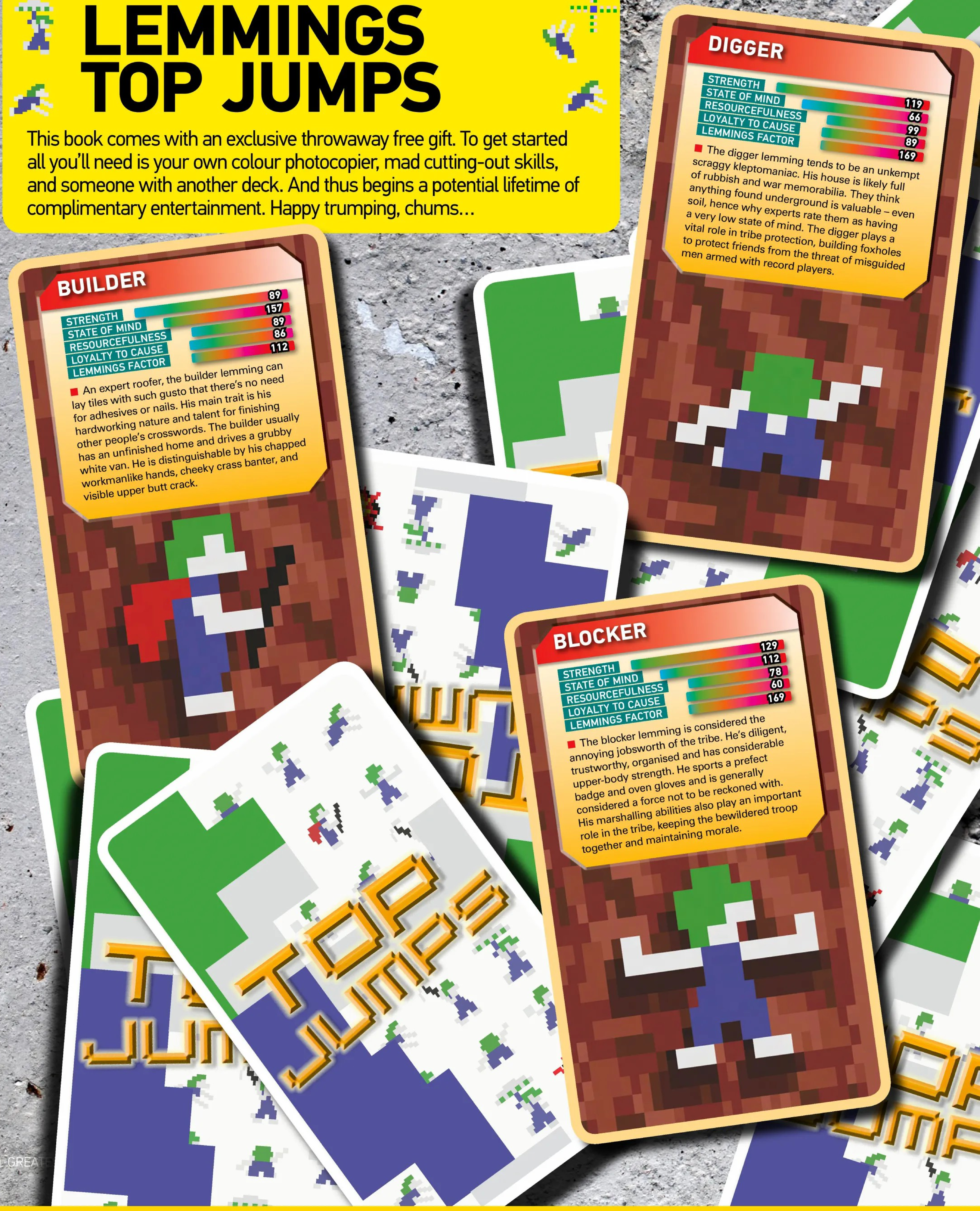
A Psygnosis Amiga classic gets brilliantly parodied in another. Can you guess which one?

Taito's colourful platforming classic, *Rainbow Islands*, gets sent up in red brickwork.

The most peculiar spin-off found our heroes unwinding and unloading with a paintball gun.

LEMMINGS TOP JUMPS

This book comes with an exclusive throwaway free gift. To get started all you'll need is your own colour photocopier, mad cutting-out skills, and someone with another deck. And thus begins a potential lifetime of complimentary entertainment. Happy trumping, chums…



BUILDER

STRENGTH	89
STATE OF MIND	157
RESOURCEFULNESS	89
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	86
LEMMINGS FACTOR	112

■ An expert roofer, the builder lemming can lay tiles with such gusto that there's no need for adhesives or nails. His main trait is his hardworking nature and talent for finishing other people's crosswords. The builder usually has an unfinished home and drives a grubby white van. He is distinguishable by his chapped workmanlike hands, cheeky crass banter, and visible upper butt crack.

DIGGER

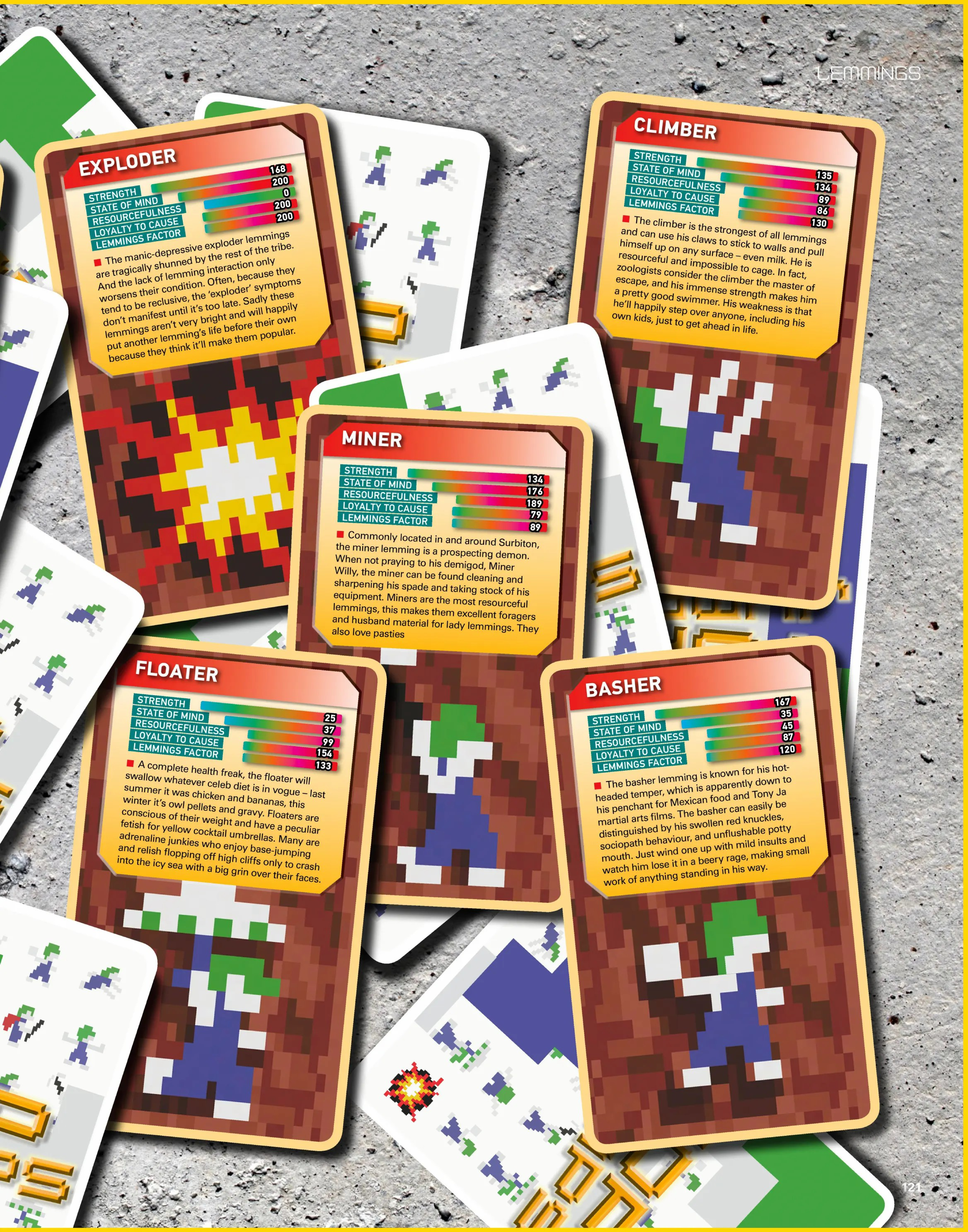
STRENGTH	119
STATE OF MIND	66
RESOURCEFULNESS	99
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	89
LEMMINGS FACTOR	169

■ The digger lemming tends to be an unkempt scraggy kleptomaniac. His house is likely full of rubbish and war memorabilia. They think anything found underground is valuable – even soil, hence why experts rate them as having a very low state of mind. The digger plays a vital role in tribe protection, building foxholes to protect friends from the threat of misguided men armed with record players.

BLOCKER

STRENGTH	129
STATE OF MIND	112
RESOURCEFULNESS	78
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	60
LEMMINGS FACTOR	169

■ The blocker lemming is considered the annoying jobsworth of the tribe. He's diligent, trustworthy, organised and has considerable upper-body strength. He sports a prefect badge and oven gloves and is generally considered a force not to be reckoned with. His marshalling abilities also play an important role in the tribe, keeping the bewildered troop together and maintaining morale.



EXPLODER

STRENGTH	168
STATE OF MIND	200
RESOURCEFULNESS	0
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	200
LEMMINGS FACTOR	200

■ The manic-depressive exploder lemmings are tragically shunned by the rest of the tribe. And the lack of lemming interaction only worsens their condition. Often, because they tend to be reclusive, the 'exploder' symptoms don't manifest until it's too late. Sadly these lemmings aren't very bright and will happily put another lemming's life before their own because they think it'll make them popular.

CLIMBER

STRENGTH	135
STATE OF MIND	134
RESOURCEFULNESS	89
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	86
LEMMINGS FACTOR	130

■ The climber is the strongest of all lemmings and can use his claws to stick to walls and pull himself up on any surface – even milk. He is resourceful and impossible to cage. In fact, zoologists consider the climber the master of escape, and his immense strength makes him a pretty good swimmer. His weakness is that he'll happily step over anyone, including his own kids, just to get ahead in life.

MINER

STRENGTH	134
STATE OF MIND	176
RESOURCEFULNESS	189
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	79
LEMMINGS FACTOR	89

■ Commonly located in and around Surbiton, the miner lemming is a prospecting demon. When not praying to his demigod, Miner Willy, the miner can be found cleaning and sharpening his spade and taking stock of his equipment. Miners are the most resourceful lemmings, this makes them excellent foragers and husband material for lady lemmings. They also love pasties

FLOATER

STRENGTH	25
STATE OF MIND	37
RESOURCEFULNESS	99
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	154
LEMMINGS FACTOR	133

■ A complete health freak, the floater will swallow whatever celeb diet is in vogue – last summer it was chicken and bananas, this winter it's owl pellets and gravy. Floaters are conscious of their weight and have a peculiar fetish for yellow cocktail umbrellas. Many are adrenaline junkies who enjoy base-jumping and relish flopping off high cliffs only to crash into the icy sea with a big grin over their faces.

BASHER

STRENGTH	167
STATE OF MIND	35
RESOURCEFULNESS	45
LOYALTY TO CAUSE	87
LEMMINGS FACTOR	120

■ The basher lemming is known for his hot-headed temper, which is apparently down to his penchant for Mexican food and Tony Ja martial arts films. The basher can easily be distinguished by his swollen red knuckles, sociopath behaviour, and unflushable potty mouth. Just wind one up with mild insults and watch him lose it in a beery rage, making small work of anything standing in his way.

DUKE NUKEM

As the future of Duke Nukem Forever drifts further into limbo, this issue we look back at the blonde bombshell, who proved 'nobody steals our chicks… and lives'

ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** DUKE NUKEM
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** DUKE NUKEM
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** DUKE NUKEM'S BULLETSTORM TOUR
- **» FINEST HOUR:** DUKE NUKEM 3D
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** QUIPS

Rarely will you see a manufactured hero in a first-person shooter. The genre traditionally chooses not to breathe character and personality into its heroes precisely because it is designed to cast you firmly inside those boots. Many would argue that having a boisterous protagonist would smash the delicate scales of immersion upon which the genre rests. After all, in the worlds of *Doom* and *Quake*, two of the biggest FPS games to ever grace PC screens, there was little in the way of narrative or a focal hero tying events together, and if there was, such as *Wolfenstein 3D*'s American GI, William 'BJ' Blazkowicz, they rarely muttered a word during their whole sorry ordeal. First-person shooters, at least in these early days, were nothing more than an avatar that you couldn't see.

In 1996 though, a seismic shift occurred. The world saw a new kind of FPS – one that immersed the player in worlds primed with all manner of interactivity, rather than claustrophobic corridors, and starred a steroid-chomping muscle-bound hero who sprayed quips as quick as bullets. Moreover, the game was a brilliant parody of the genre it existed in. Duke was a machismo videogame hero, the likes of which no one had ever quite seen before. He was a one-man army with more muscles than brain cells. Had 3D Realms opted to go down the safer option and cast us in the driving seat, we suspect the game would've been swallowed up by the 3D models of *Quake* and *Unreal* quicker than you could say 'shake it, baby'.

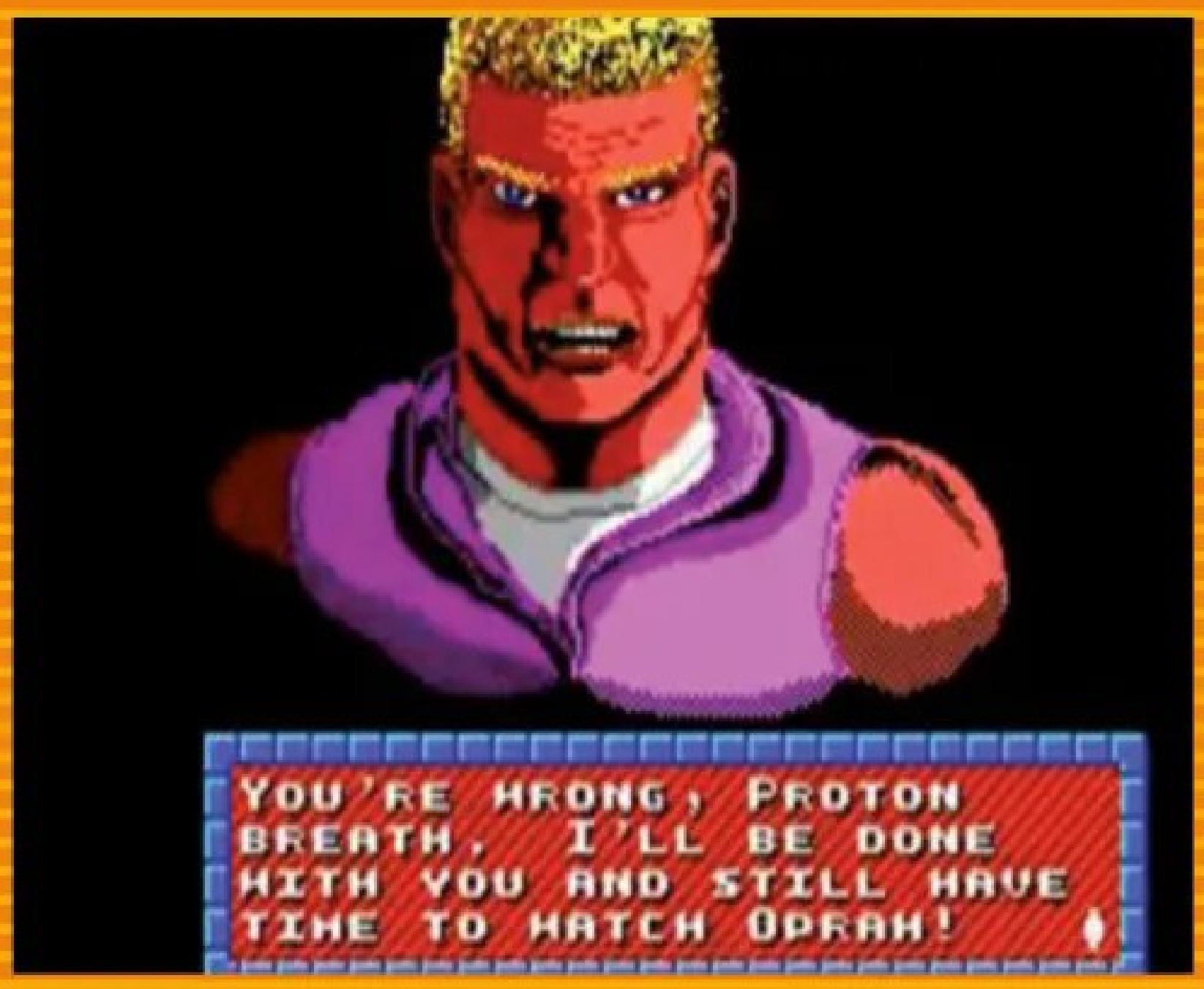
> **"Duke was a machismo videogame hero no one had ever quite seen before"**

While most people remember Duke for his first 3D outing on the PC, Duke Nukem actually started life in a 1991 2D platform shooter by Apogee Software (the shareware company that helped push *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* out to the masses). Originally, Duke wasn't as arrogant as he was in his 3D days. He didn't wear his iconic shades, he looked a bit like Flash Gordon, and his actions were far less irreverent. Also, due to some early copyright befuddlement – Apogee thought the name Duke Nukem had already been trademarked – Duke was originally christened 'Duke Nukum' before it was changed in *Duke Nukem II*. When 3D Realms, an arm of Apogee Software, saw the plaudits being picked up by *Doom* and *Quake*, they sought to use their experience within the FPS genre to release a new type of FPS game onto the market, and dusted off Duke to play the hero because 'the name rhymed and nuking things sounded cool', or so the story goes.

For Duke's first 3D foray, the decision was made late in the game's development to ply it with excess, and irreverent humour. Duke's persona was influenced by two iconic stars of the big screen: John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. His physical appearance, however, was more akin to Arnold Schwarzenegger or Dolph Lundgren. It was Nukem's repertoire of audible quips and catchphrases that best showed his wide range of cinematic influences and became the most effective way to express his characteristics in the absence of an in-game visual presence. Memorable lines like "It's time to kick ass and chew bubble gum and I'm all outta gum" (taken from *They Live*) or "Hail to the king, baby" (*Army Of Darkness*) drew on a rich history of cult action heroes and established Duke among the ranks of B-movie greats like Bruce Campbell.

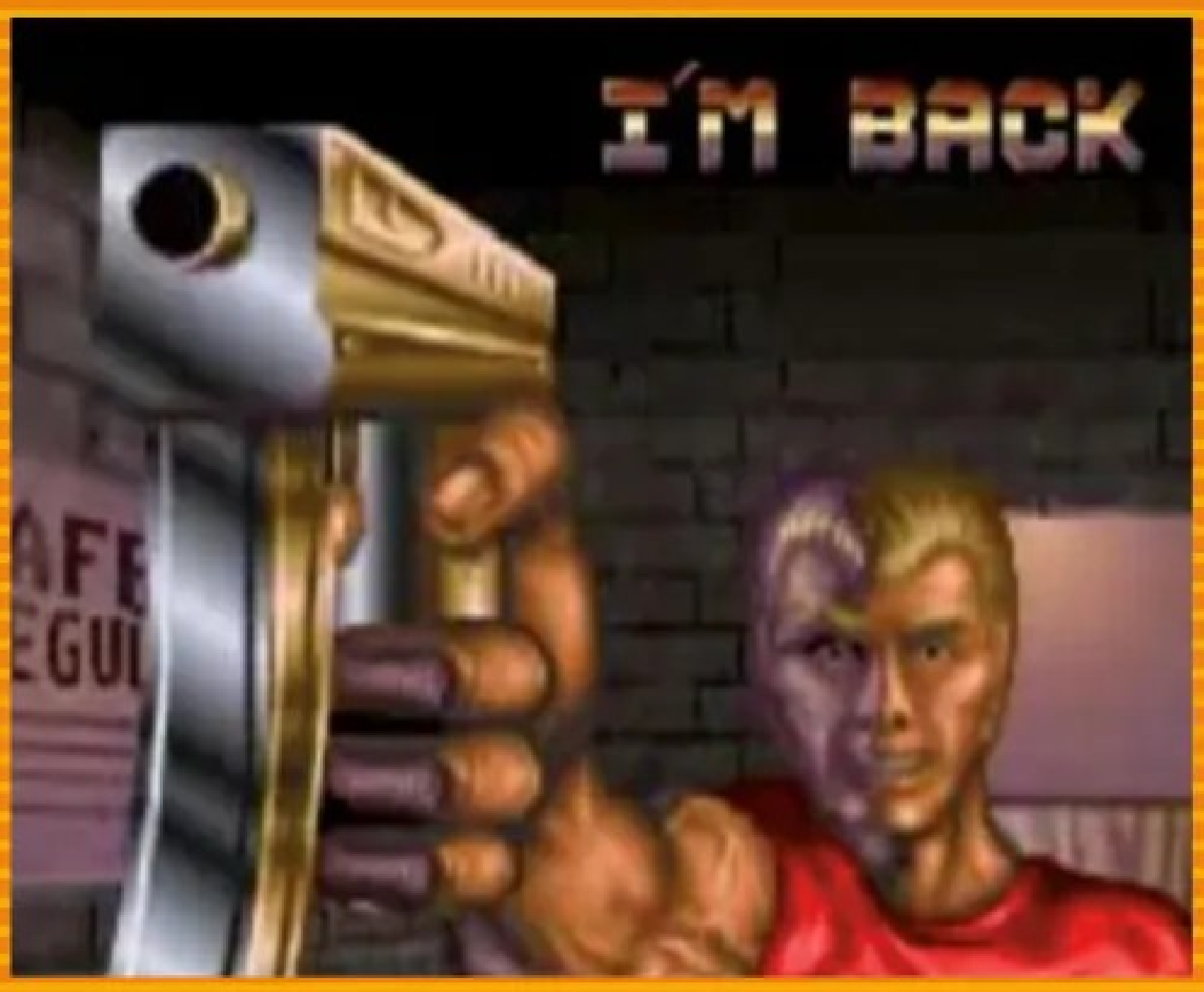
The aptly titled *Duke Nukem Forever* was released in 2011 after being in development hell for 14 years. It failed to find favour, thanks to its poor taste and outdated mechanics. Nowadays it seems the FPS hero falls into either the generic 'Doom guy' mould or the more realistic but less fun template set out by Gordon Freeman. Such characters have their place of course, but in a genre that is first and foremost about shooting everything in sight, we sometimes yearn for a man who's simply prepared to "make those alien bastards pay". ✱

> MAGIC MOMENTS

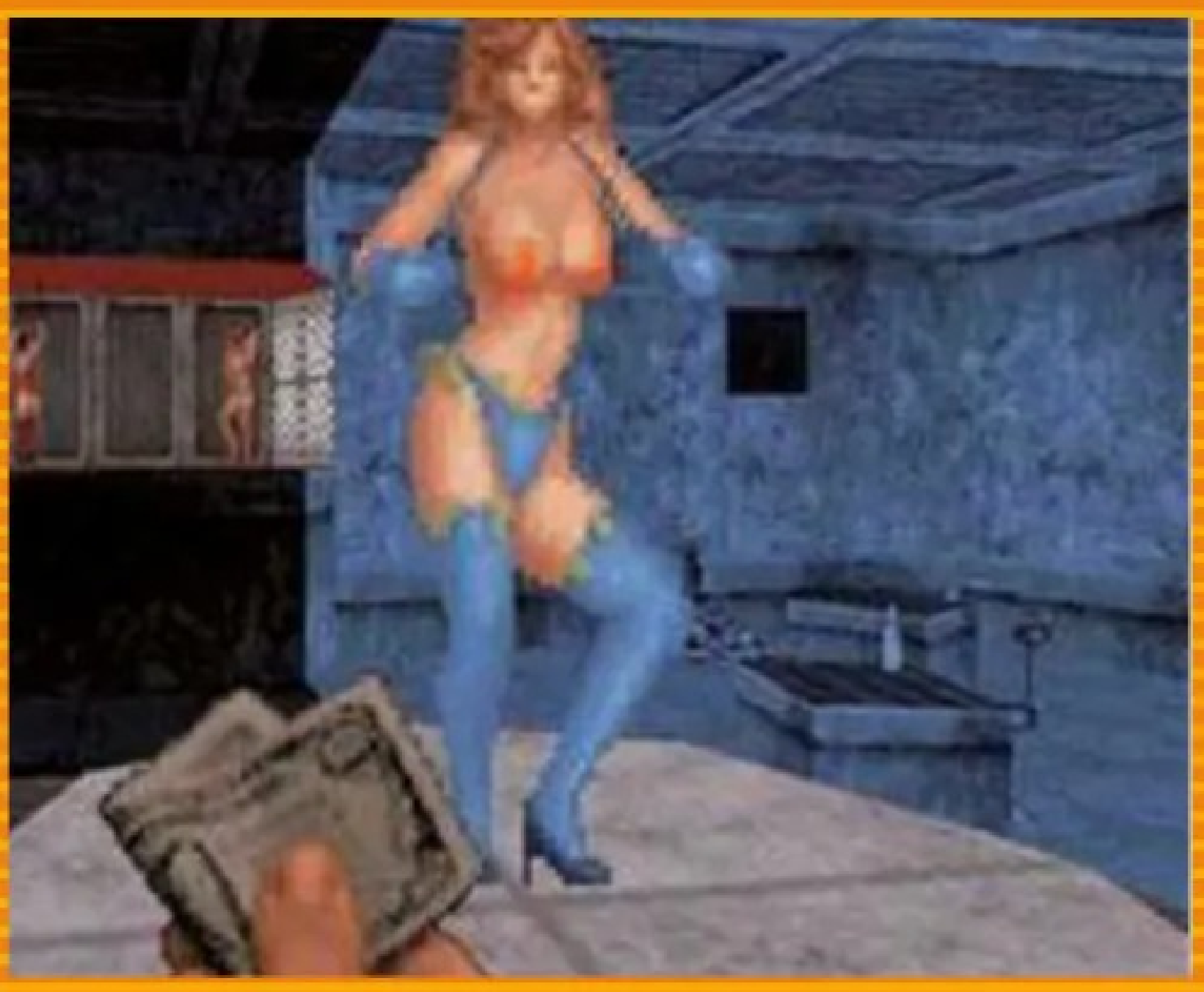


YOU'RE WRONG, PROTON BREATH. I'LL BE DONE WITH YOU AND STILL HAVE TIME TO WATCH OPRAH!

■ Duke smashed onto our screens in 1991 in a side-scrolling PC shooter from Apogee Software.

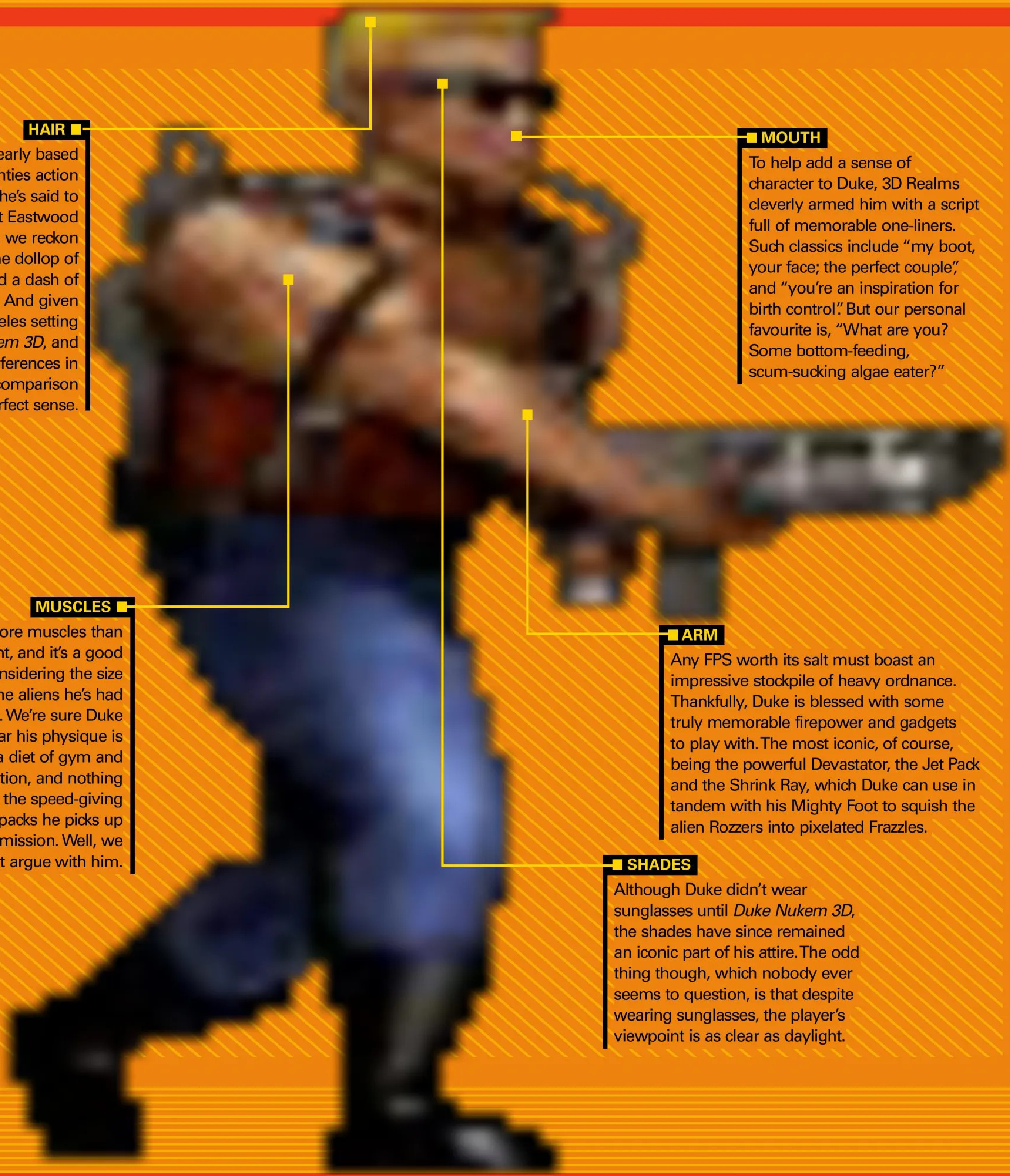


■ Apogee releases a sequel, but this time Duke gets a name change. Duke Nukem is born.



■ When Duke asks this exotic dancer to 'shake it, baby', she kindly obliges.

■ The ridiculous trailer for the *Duke Nukem* trilogy caused a stir at 2008's E3.



HAIR

Duke's look is clearly based on that of an Eighties action star. Although he's said to be based on Clint Eastwood and John Wayne, we reckon Duke is more one dollop of Snake Plisskin and a dash of Dolph Lundgren. And given the Los Angeles setting of *Duke Nukem 3D*, and frequent movie references in the game, the comparison makes perfect sense.

MOUTH

To help add a sense of character to Duke, 3D Realms cleverly armed him with a script full of memorable one-liners. Such classics include "my boot, your face; the perfect couple", and "you're an inspiration for birth control". But our personal favourite is, "What are you? Some bottom-feeding, scum-sucking algae eater?"

MUSCLES

Duke has more muscles than he can count, and it's a good thing, too, considering the size of some of the aliens he's had to take down. We're sure Duke would swear his physique is all down to a diet of gym and determination, and nothing to do with the speed-giving steroid packs he picks up during his mission. Well, we wouldn't argue with him.

ARM

Any FPS worth its salt must boast an impressive stockpile of heavy ordnance. Thankfully, Duke is blessed with some truly memorable firepower and gadgets to play with. The most iconic, of course, being the powerful Devastator, the Jet Pack and the Shrink Ray, which Duke can use in tandem with his Mighty Foot to squish the alien Rozzers into pixelated Frazzles.

SHADES

Although Duke didn't wear sunglasses until *Duke Nukem 3D*, the shades have since remained an iconic part of his attire. The odd thing though, which nobody ever seems to question, is that despite wearing sunglasses, the player's viewpoint is as clear as daylight.

■ Duke kicks a field goal using this boss's eyeball as a football.

■ Duke finds himself in the Wild West in *Zero Hour*. Naturally, he fits right in.

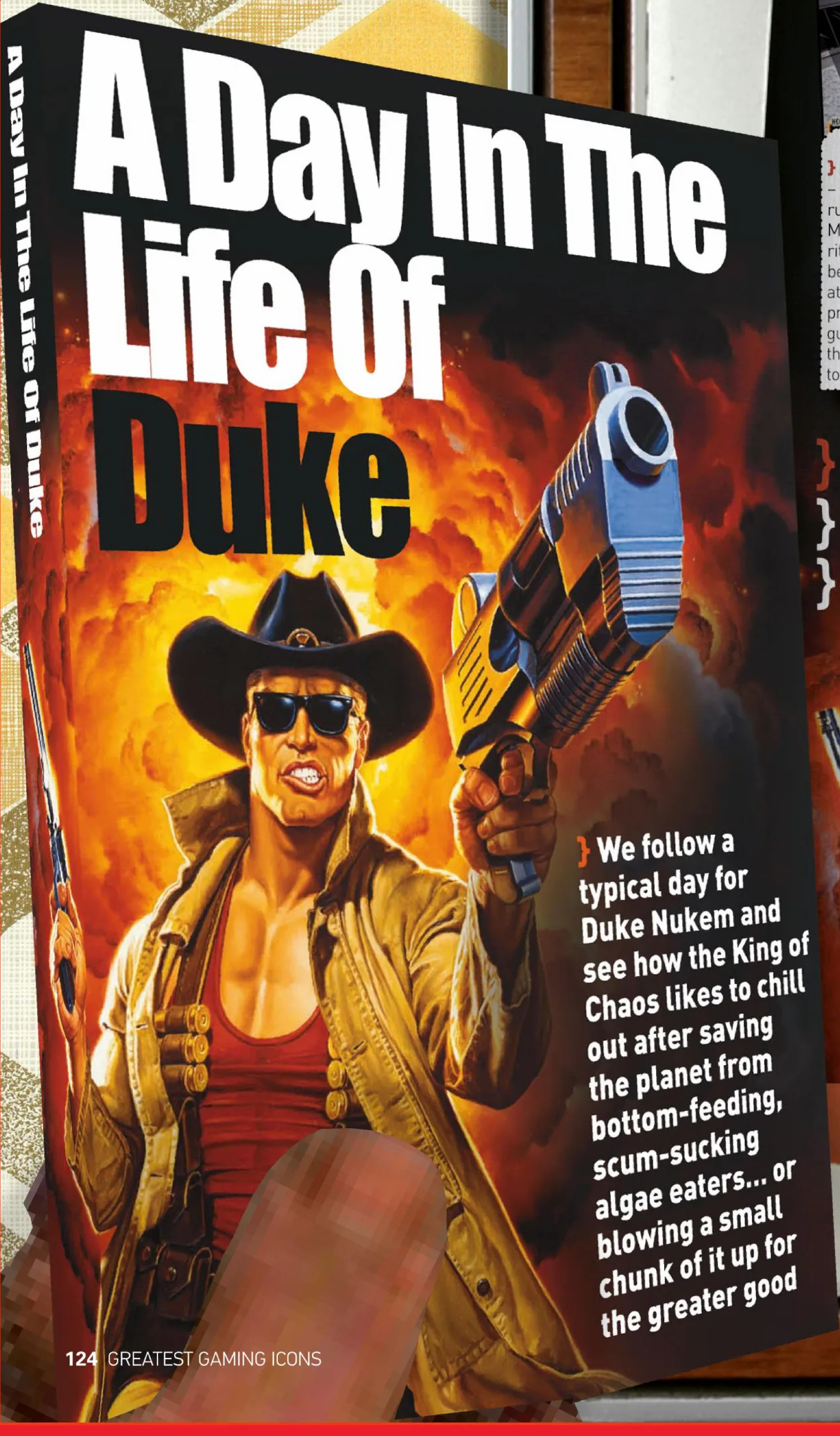
"When it's done"
www.3drealms.com

■ When it's done it's done. Or not, as the case may be. Rest in peace, 3D Realms…

■ Duke had to pinch himself when he received the mission entitled Planet of the Babes.

A Day In The Life Of Duke

A Day In The Life Of Duke



} We follow a typical day for Duke Nukem and see how the King of Chaos likes to chill out after saving the planet from bottom-feeding, scum-sucking algae eaters… or blowing a small chunk of it up for the greater good

} PLAY MOVIE
} INSIDE LOOK
} LANGUAGE

9:00am

SHOTGUN
HEALTH
AMMO
19

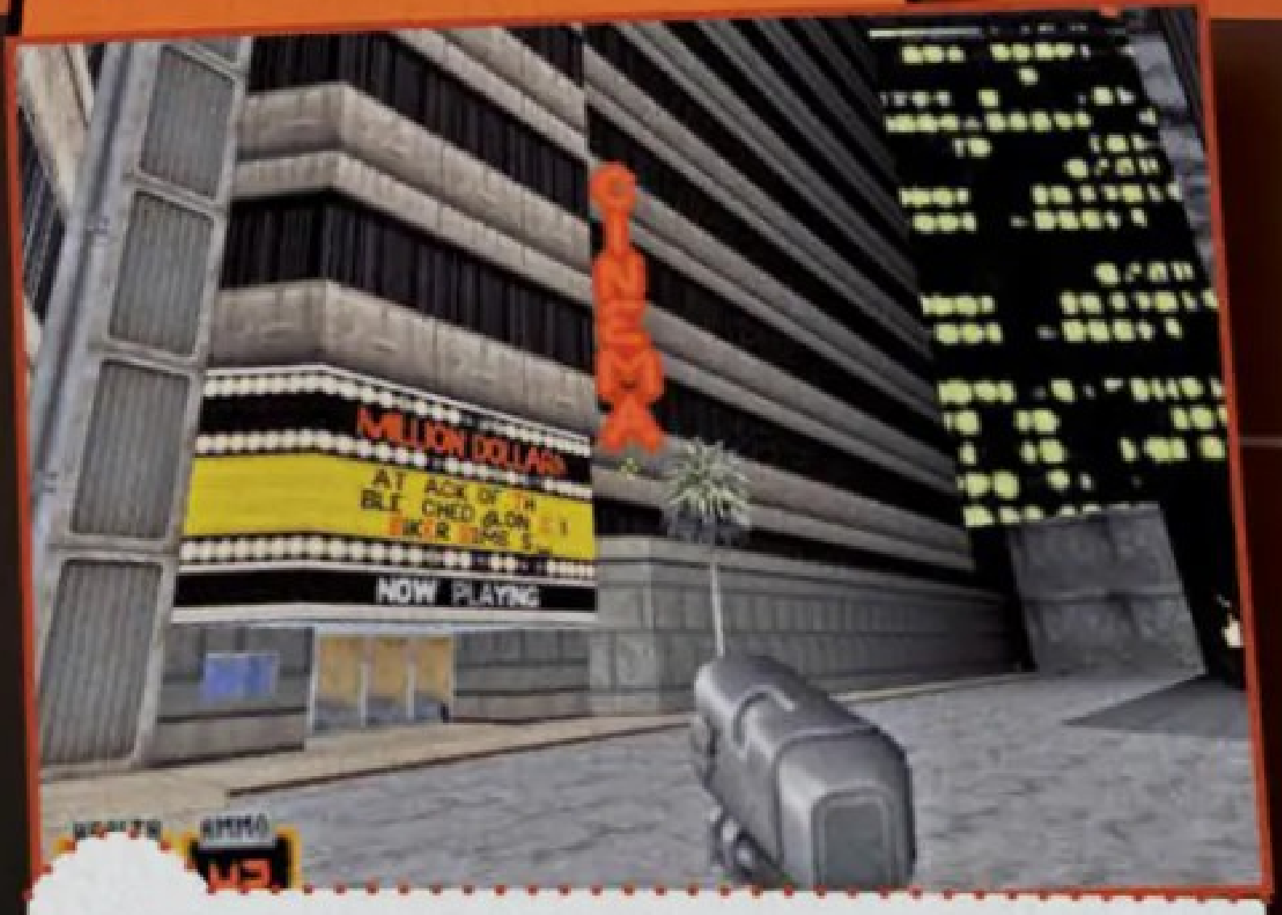
} Right, so I get up when I want – except on Wednesdays when I get rudely awakened by the dustmen. My usual Wednesday-morning ritual includes perching outside my bedroom window pointing a shotgun at the garbage truck while screaming profanities. Don't worry though, the gun's empty… most of the time, and there's normally quite a comical tone to my swearing voice.

9:15am

HEALTH
AMMO
6

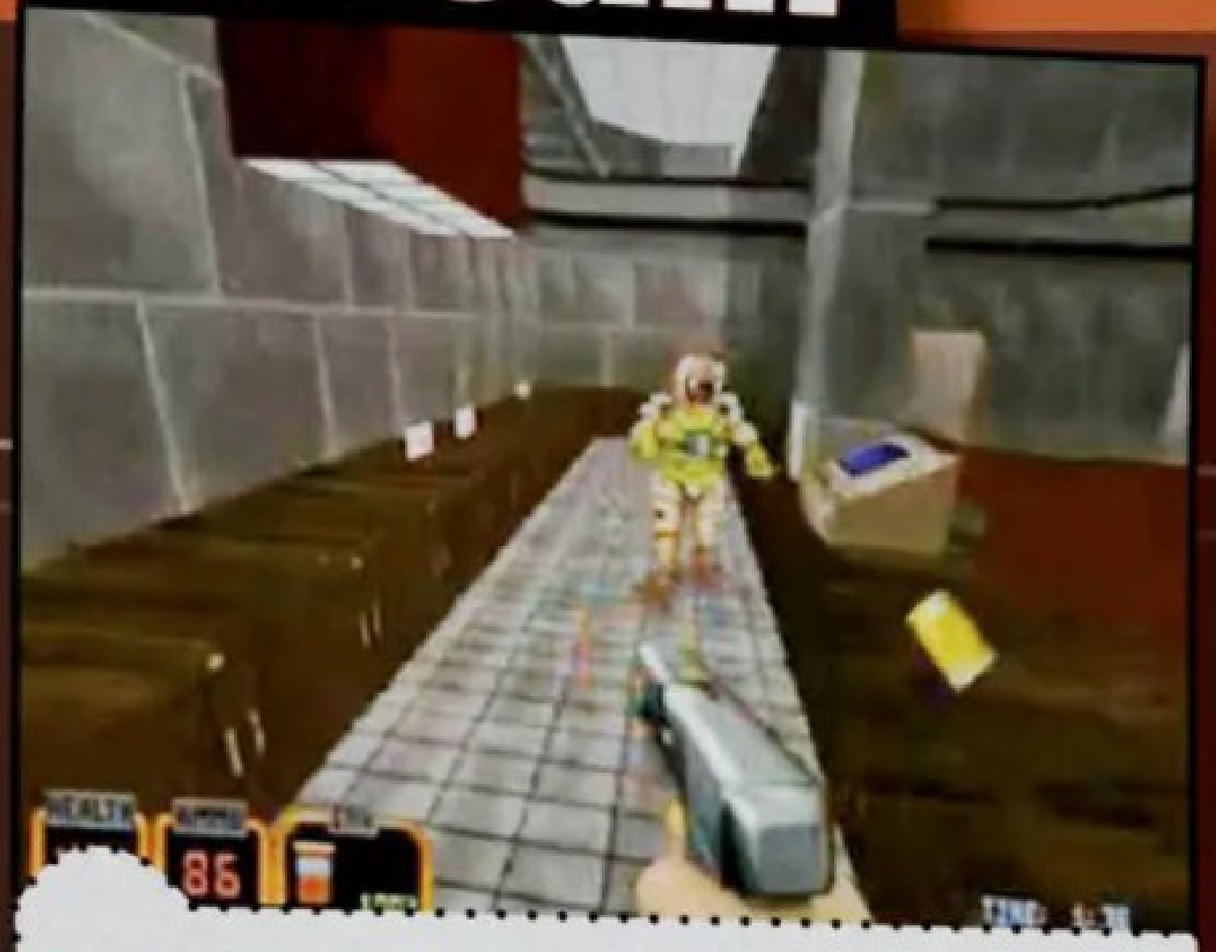
} After a big bowl of Steroid Crispies, flushed down with half a pint of gin and a banana, I take my dog Bonkers for a walk. I named him after that catchy Dizzee Rascal track that gets played on the radio, like, 17 times an hour. After walking through the cemetery to feed the squirrels and put fresh flowers on the gravestones of my dead pets, me and Bonkers usually play catch-the-pipe-bomb in the football stadium.

11:00am



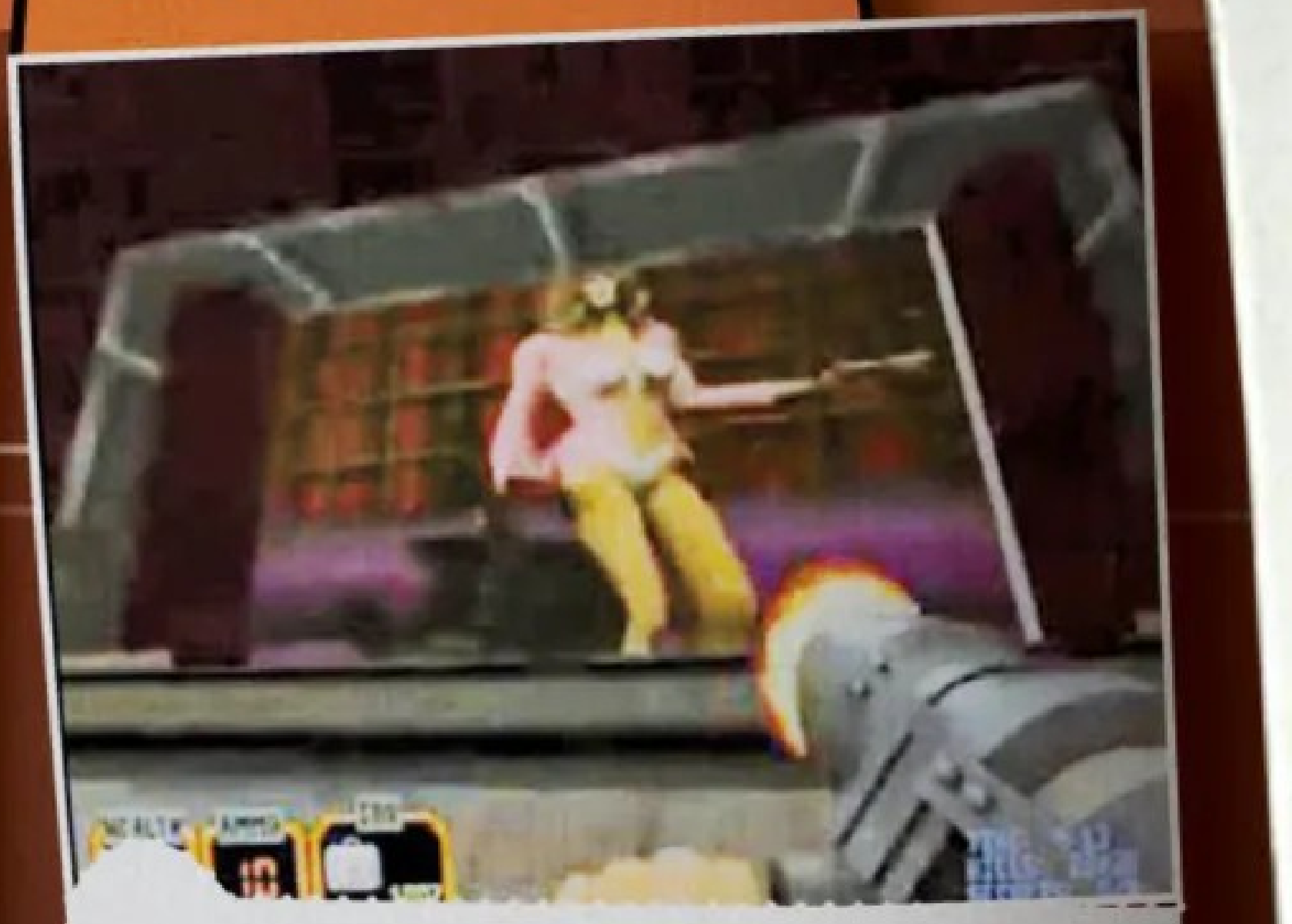
I usually exercise with Bonkers and then catch a movie at the multiplex. What's on today? Ah, brilliant, *Million Dollar Baby* (again). That film is to *Rocky* what *Coyote Ugly* is to *Cocktail*. Oh, wait a minute. It seems there's a new flick in: At Ack Of Th Ble Ched Blon Biker Bimb S? Sounds foreign, I'm sold. Hopefully there'll be some fully naked Eastern-European chicks in it, and very little in the way of a plot.

11:15am



After purchasing my ticket, I barge my way to the front of the concessions stand to buy sustenance and leer at any hot chicks I push over in the queue. Apparently the ugly-looking alien working behind the counter said hotdogs were going to be a 15-minute wait because a pig bought the last one off the roller. I pull out a gun and the clerk manages to improve my odds. Now I only have to wait 14 minutes.

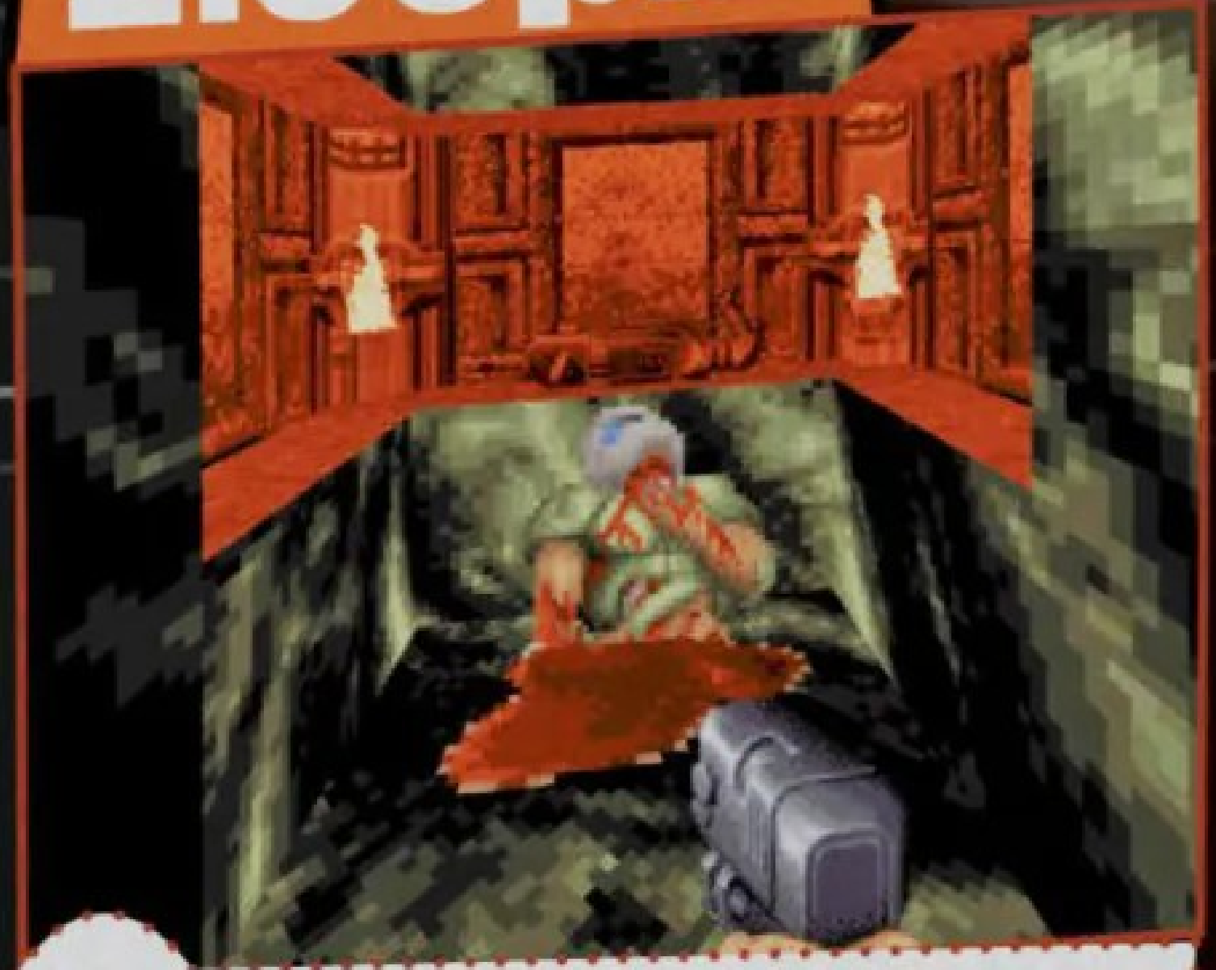
11:30am



This film rocks. And it's not foreign. It's about a girl with large hair who dances around in her bra and pants while holding a gun. This is my kind of film. Although some guy in an overcoat at the front of the screen keeps groaning, and it's starting to piss me off. I politely point a rocket launcher at his head and he makes a loud plopping noise. Mission over, I get back to watching the woman in her pants.

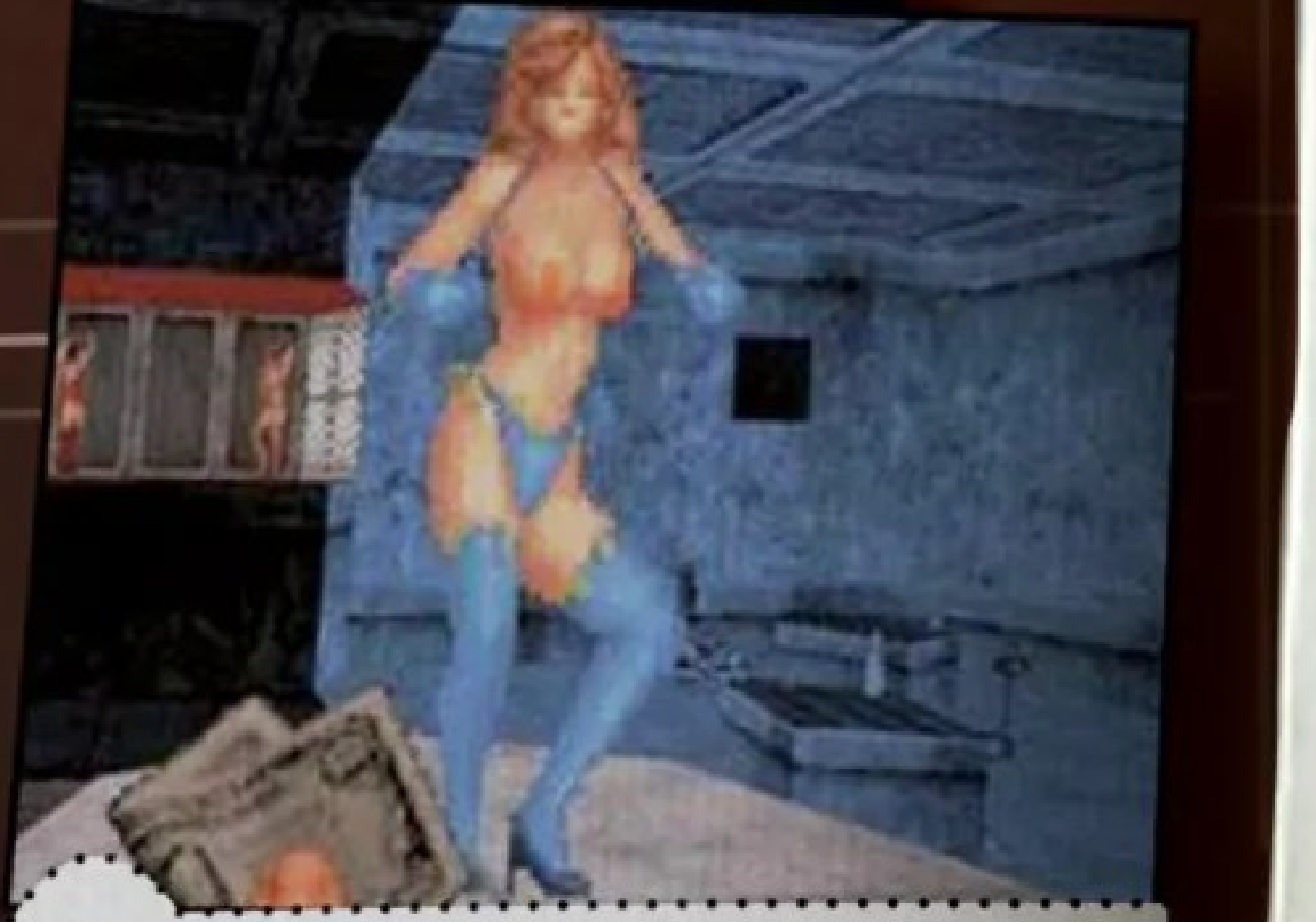
SCENE SELECTION

2:00pm



In the afternoon I often hunt Easter eggs. Just grab a star map and go exploring, you'll find plenty of celebrities and pop culture references. Today I bumped into one of those *Doom* marines, but it seems someone beat me to it. And by the look of things, that Indiana Jones chap just read my review of *Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull* on my blog and took it badly. Perhaps it was harsh to compare it to *Hotel For Dogs*.

4:00pm



Wednesday is two-for-one at Tassels, my local strip bar. As I get more bang for my buck, I spend the rest of my day here until I get bored or the bouncers kick me out. Most of the girls are really bright and are just doing this before going on to do other things. Take Trixie here, she's just a perpetual clothes taker-offer to pay her way through medical school. I respect that. Here's 50 bucks to 'shake 'em, baby'.

MAIN MENU

SONIC

His mascot status may have been tarnished by a recent string of sub-standard games, but the 16-bit era Sonic remains one of the greatest retro characters of all time

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** SONIC
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** RAD MOBILE
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (2020 FILM)
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** BEING REALLY FAST

In 1990, Alex Kidd, Sega's mascot at the time, sat shyly by, watching a very happy plumber jumping atop the world, leading Nintendo to dominance. Sega needed an icon. And fast. Something that could catch up with Mario and halt his incessant jumping with a great big logo reading 'Sega'. To this end, the company introduced an internal competition to design a new character. AM8, Sega's Research & Development department, came up with a wealth of designs, including a Theodore Roosevelt in pyjamas, from which Doctor Eggman would later be shaped; an armadillo, which became Mighty the Armadillo; a rabbit; a bulldog; and a hedgehog.

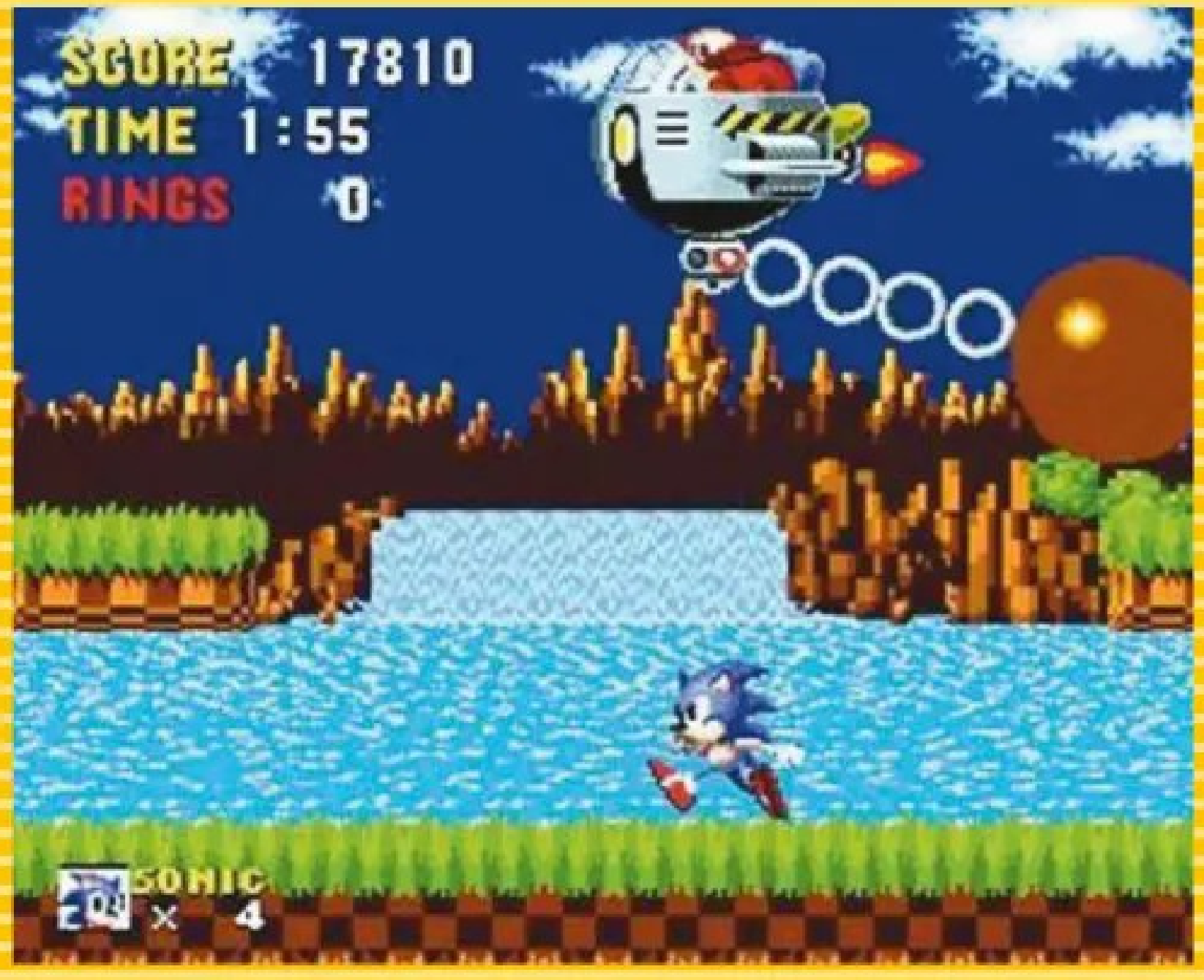
To replicate Mario would instantly reduce Sega to a secondary position, behind Nintendo. Mario was a slightly humble, podgy and rather slow plumber who had taken the helm for running and jumping; in order to glean a fresh audience and a uniqueness in brand, Sega needed to move in the opposite direction, to produce a cool character for a fast and slick style of gameplay. This brought the character competition down to two: Mighty the Armadillo and Sonic the Hedgehog. Both the armadillo and the hedgehog are capable of rolling into balls and are therefore adaptable to the gaming mechanic of the eventual title, but Naoto Oshima's Sonic was chosen for his 'spiky' features. The importance of this seemingly tiny detail is obvious: Sonic's slicked-back hair is one of the defining features that make him cool. Mario was fun; Sonic was cool.

As a mascot, Sonic the Hedgehog was important not just to his own game, but also to Sega as a whole. For this reason, Sega used aggressive marketing with Sonic unlike any other game of the time. It was a campaign that both matched and amplified Sonic's persona: it had attitude. Even prior to his release, Sonic the Hedgehog was touring with the popular Japanese music group 'Dreams Come True', where he featured on the tour video trailer. But 1993 was the year of the hedgehog. That a memorable and busy 12 months saw Sonic sponsoring Japanese professional soccer team JEF United Ichihara; he was also employed by Formula One's Williams team, the car of which featured Sonic's white gloves and red trainers; and he even released his own comic book and cartoon series. Add to these the 'Sega Sonic Popcorn Shop', three junior book series, six games in the same year, the 'Sega Sonic Cosmo Fighter' children's ride, and the 65-foot tall Sonic balloon that debuted in 1993's Thanksgiving Day Parade and you also have the emergence of an icon in the public eye.

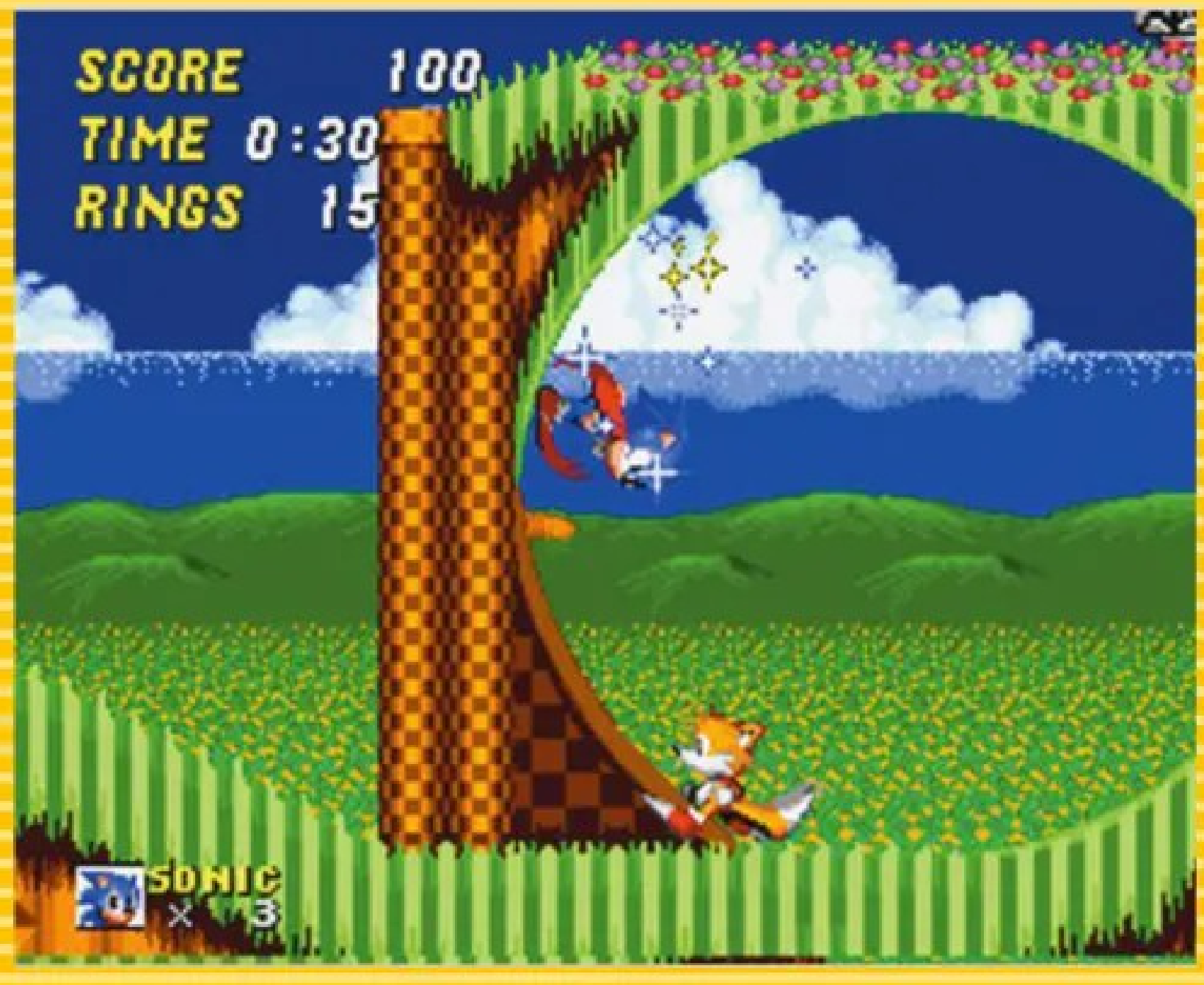
It is possible, however, that Sonic was not actually Sega's creation. A pamphlet that accompanied the *Sonic Adventure 2 Birthday Pack* tells the story of children's fiction writer Mary Garnet. The tale tells of Mary and her husband, who often worked away from home as a test pilot for the United States Air Force on a project named 'Blue Gale', the aim of which was to break the speed of sound. Mary had nicknamed her husband 'Hedgehog' because his hair stuck up on end, like the quills of the animal, when he took his helmet off. The nickname inspired Mary to combine the Blue Gale project with the Hedgehog nickname and decorate her husband's flight jacket with a blue hedgehog mascot. This blue hedgehog then developed into stories that Mary would tell her children when their father was away. The hedgehog, which she named Sonic, was a hero who would save the world and protect the innocent people and animals from evil. The similarities here are more than obvious and though many doubt the truth of the story, it is difficult to reason why Sega would tell it otherwise.

Wherever the creative flare for Sonic came from, he instantly became one of the most important creations in the industry. Sonic welcomed in a generation of platform-mascots-with-attitude – nearly all of which copied his anthropomorphism – and gave the platformer a new style and versatility. But above all, he gave the rare gift of cool. Before Sonic, platform characters were almost universally cute, bland, and devoid of personality. Then came the hedgehog: he wagged his finger, slicked back his hair, and sped through levels, beating up a fat evil scientist. Simply put: Sonic brought attitude to the platform game and we're glad he did. ✱

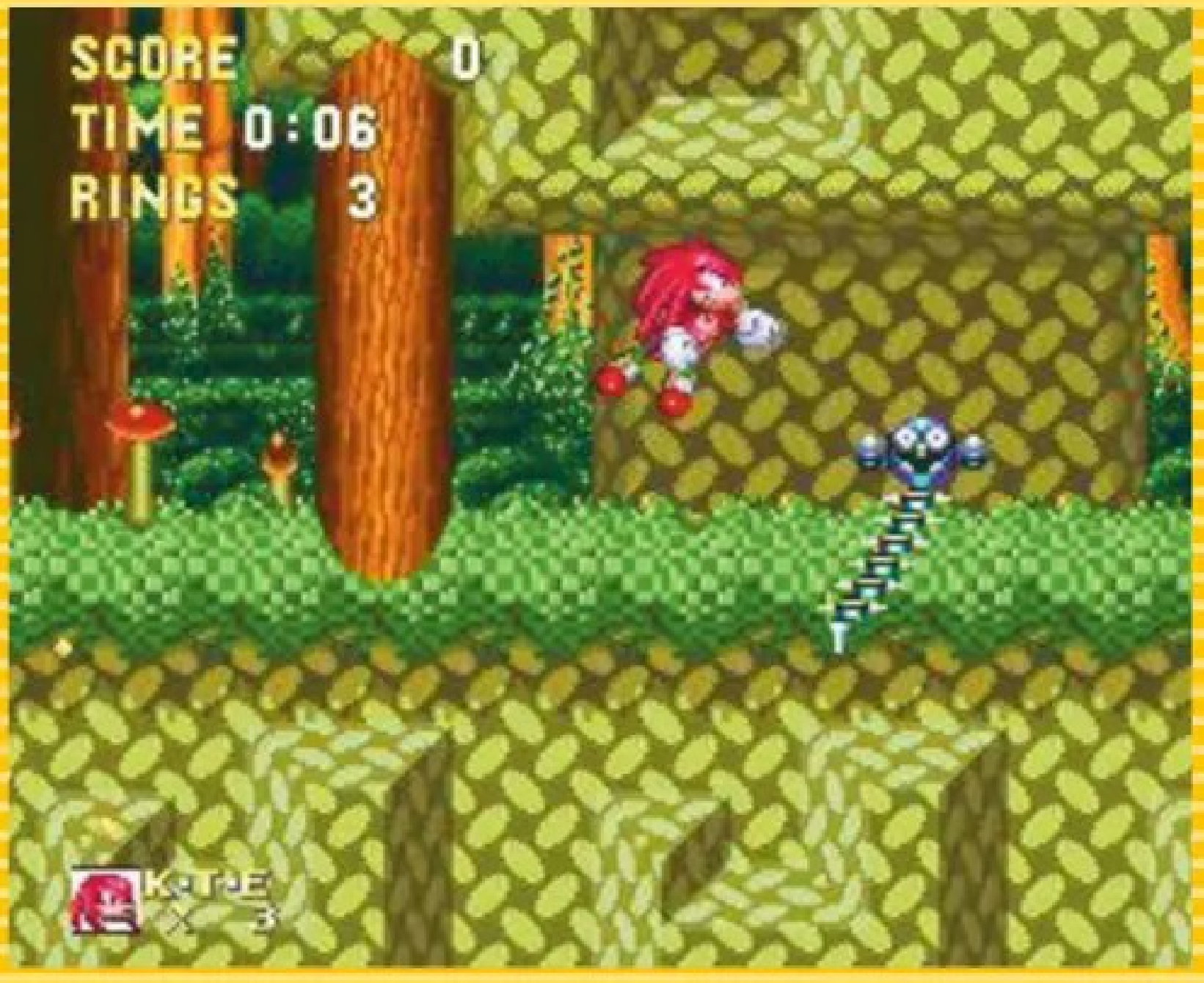
> MAGIC MOMENTS



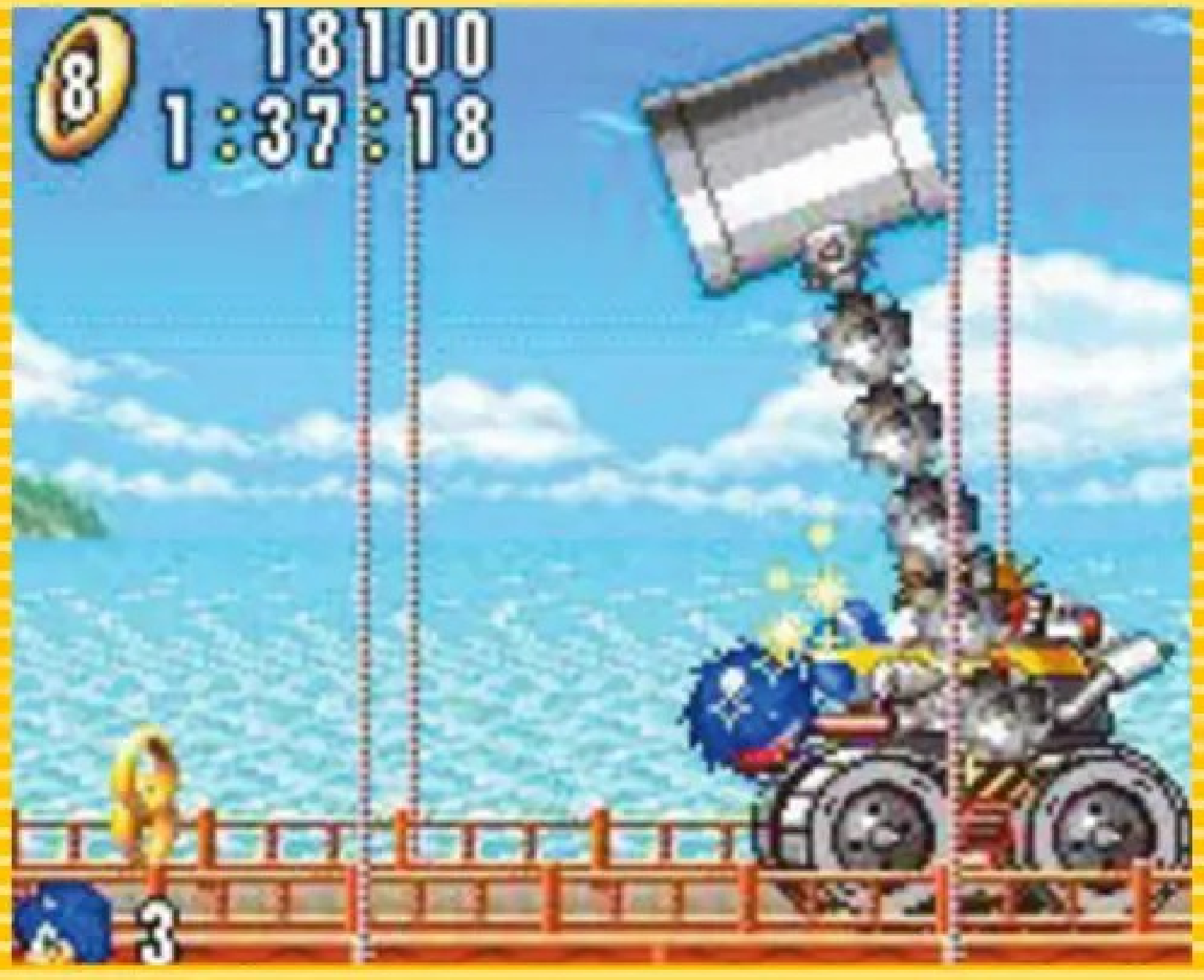
■ *Sonic The Hedgehog* saw the birth of Sonic and a host of naff mascots with attitude.



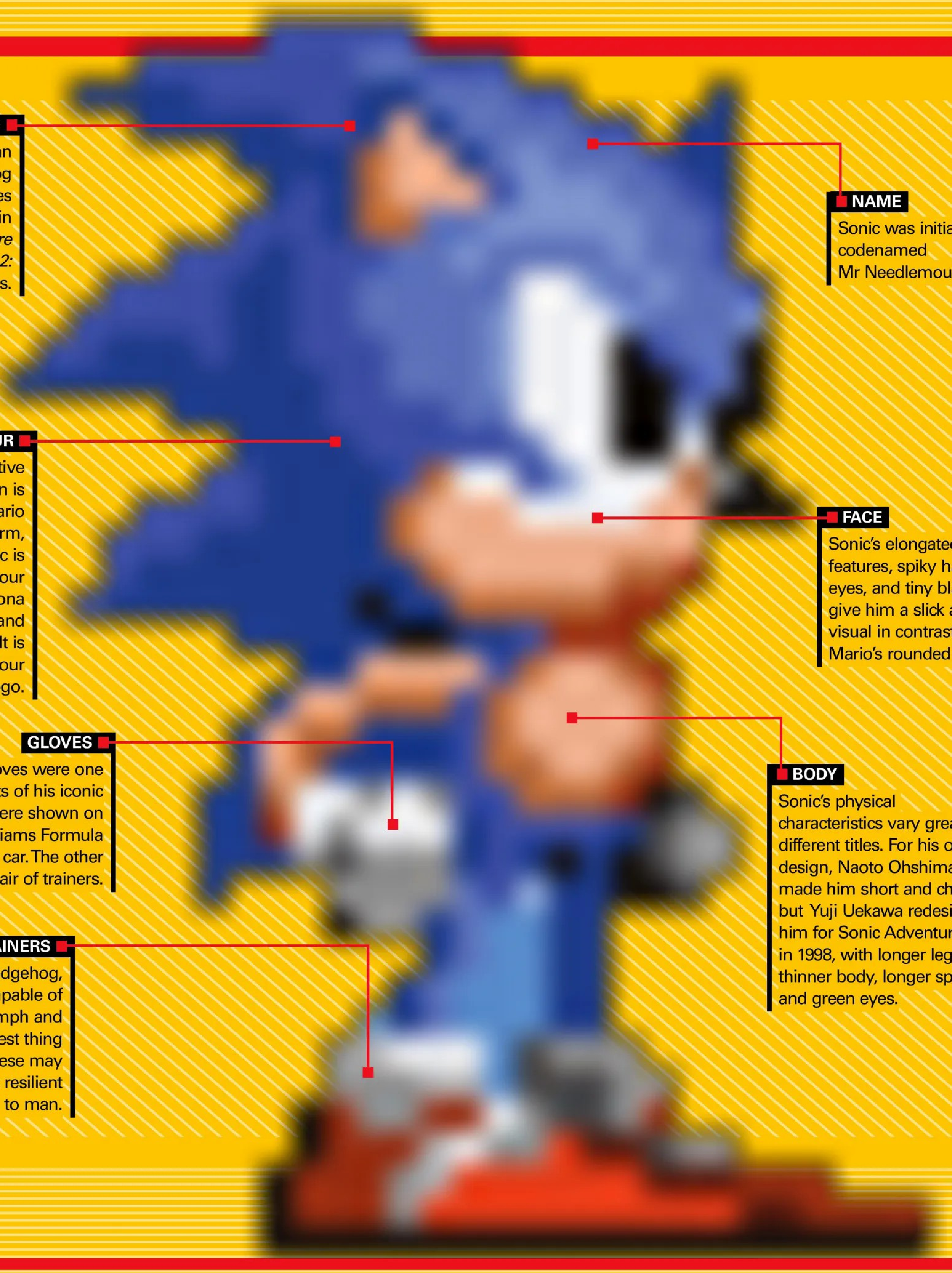
■ *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* introduced us to Tails and provided Mega Drive with one of its best games.



■ *Sonic & Knuckles* gave us lock-on technology that has rarely been replicated in later ports.



■ *Sonic Advance* saw the first Sonic title on a Nintendo console. It was good fun, too.



BREED
Sonic is most likely an African pygmy hedgehog since that is the species of hedgehog shown in the US *Sonic Adventure 2* and *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* commercials.

NAME
Sonic was initially codenamed Mr Needlemouse.

COLOUR
One of the key emotive forces in design is colour. Where Mario mainly comprises warm, earthy colours, Sonic is a cool blue. This colour reflects Sonic's persona through its relaxing and carefree qualities. It is also, of course, the colour of the Sega logo.

FACE
Sonic's elongated facial features, spiky hair, thin eyes, and tiny black nose give him a slick and cool visual in contrast to Mario's rounded features.

GLOVES
Sonic's gloves were one of two parts of his iconic design that were shown on the 1993 Williams Formula One team car. The other was his pair of trainers.

BODY
Sonic's physical characteristics vary greatly in different titles. For his original design, Naoto Ohshima made him short and childlike, but Yuji Uekawa redesigned him for Sonic Adventure in 1998, with longer legs, a thinner body, longer spikes, and green eyes.

TRAINERS
Sonic is one fast hedgehog, purportedly capable of speeds up to 761.2mph and known as 'the fastest thing alive'. Therefore, these may just be the most resilient trainers known to man.

■ The first game developed by Sonic Team USA for Dreamcast was *Sonic Adventure 2.*

SCORE 0
TIME 0'11"90
RINGS 0

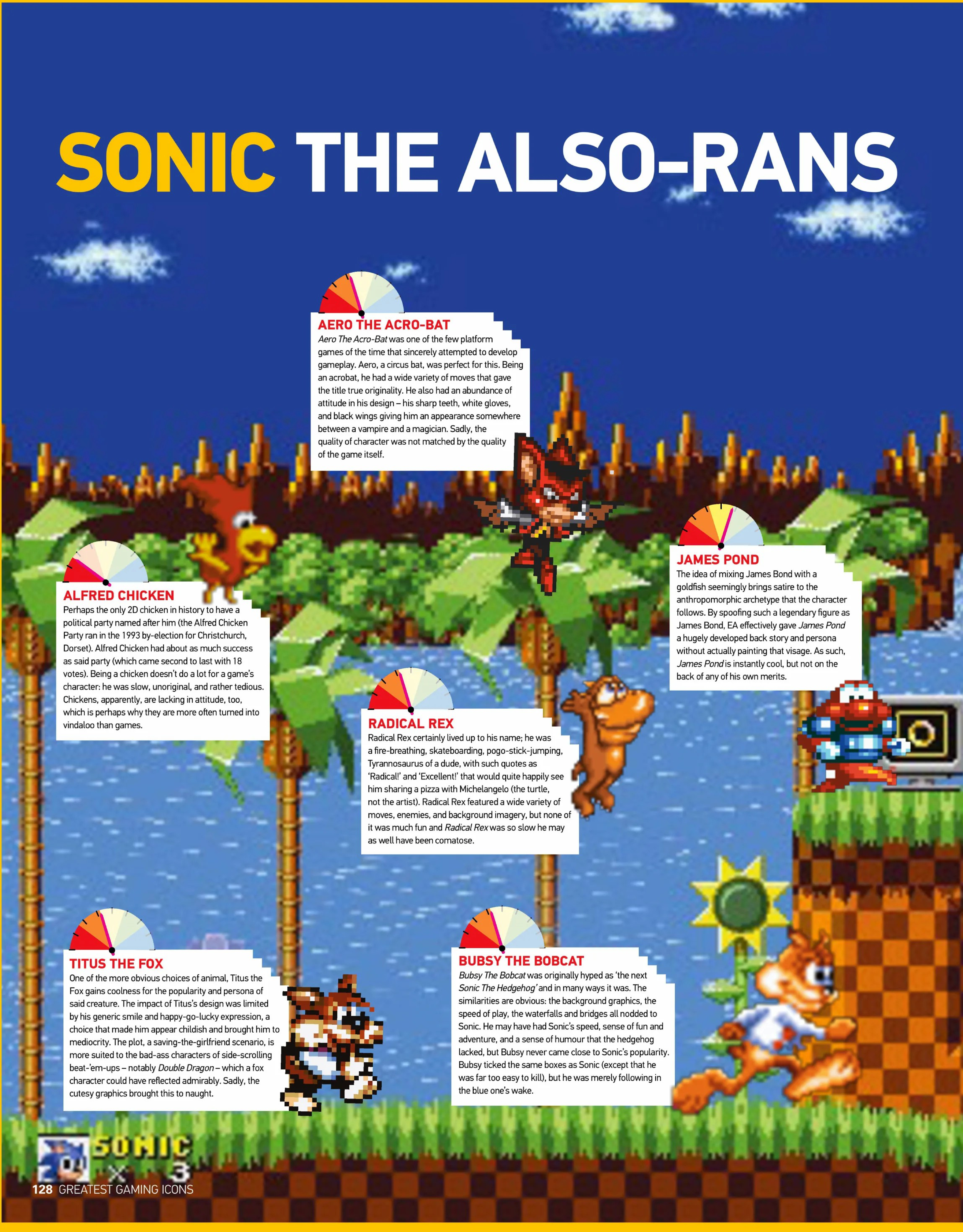
■ The Mega-CD may not have been the greatest add-on ever, but *Sonic CD* was worth playing.

SCORE 0
TIME 0:08
RINGS 13

■ The title says it all. *Sonic Mega Collection Plus* brought you 20 of the best games in the series.

■ *Sonic The Hedgehog Pocket Adventure* made waiting for buses so much easier

SONIC THE ALSO-RANS



AERO THE ACRO-BAT

Aero The Acro-Bat was one of the few platform games of the time that sincerely attempted to develop gameplay. Aero, a circus bat, was perfect for this. Being an acrobat, he had a wide variety of moves that gave the title true originality. He also had an abundance of attitude in his design – his sharp teeth, white gloves, and black wings giving him an appearance somewhere between a vampire and a magician. Sadly, the quality of character was not matched by the quality of the game itself.

ALFRED CHICKEN

Perhaps the only 2D chicken in history to have a political party named after him (the Alfred Chicken Party ran in the 1993 by-election for Christchurch, Dorset). Alfred Chicken had about as much success as said party (which came second to last with 18 votes). Being a chicken doesn't do a lot for a game's character: he was slow, unoriginal, and rather tedious. Chickens, apparently, are lacking in attitude, too, which is perhaps why they are more often turned into vindaloo than games.

JAMES POND

The idea of mixing James Bond with a goldfish seemingly brings satire to the anthropomorphic archetype that the character follows. By spoofing such a legendary figure as James Bond, EA effectively gave *James Pond* a hugely developed back story and persona without actually painting that visage. As such, *James Pond* is instantly cool, but not on the back of any of his own merits.

RADICAL REX

Radical Rex certainly lived up to his name; he was a fire-breathing, skateboarding, pogo-stick-jumping, Tyrannosaurus of a dude, with such quotes as 'Radical!' and 'Excellent!' that would quite happily see him sharing a pizza with Michelangelo (the turtle, not the artist). Radical Rex featured a wide variety of moves, enemies, and background imagery, but none of it was much fun and *Radical Rex* was so slow he may as well have been comatose.

TITUS THE FOX

One of the more obvious choices of animal, Titus the Fox gains coolness for the popularity and persona of said creature. The impact of Titus's design was limited by his generic smile and happy-go-lucky expression, a choice that made him appear childish and brought him to mediocrity. The plot, a saving-the-girlfriend scenario, is more suited to the bad-ass characters of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups – notably *Double Dragon* – which a fox character could have reflected admirably. Sadly, the cutesy graphics brought this to naught.

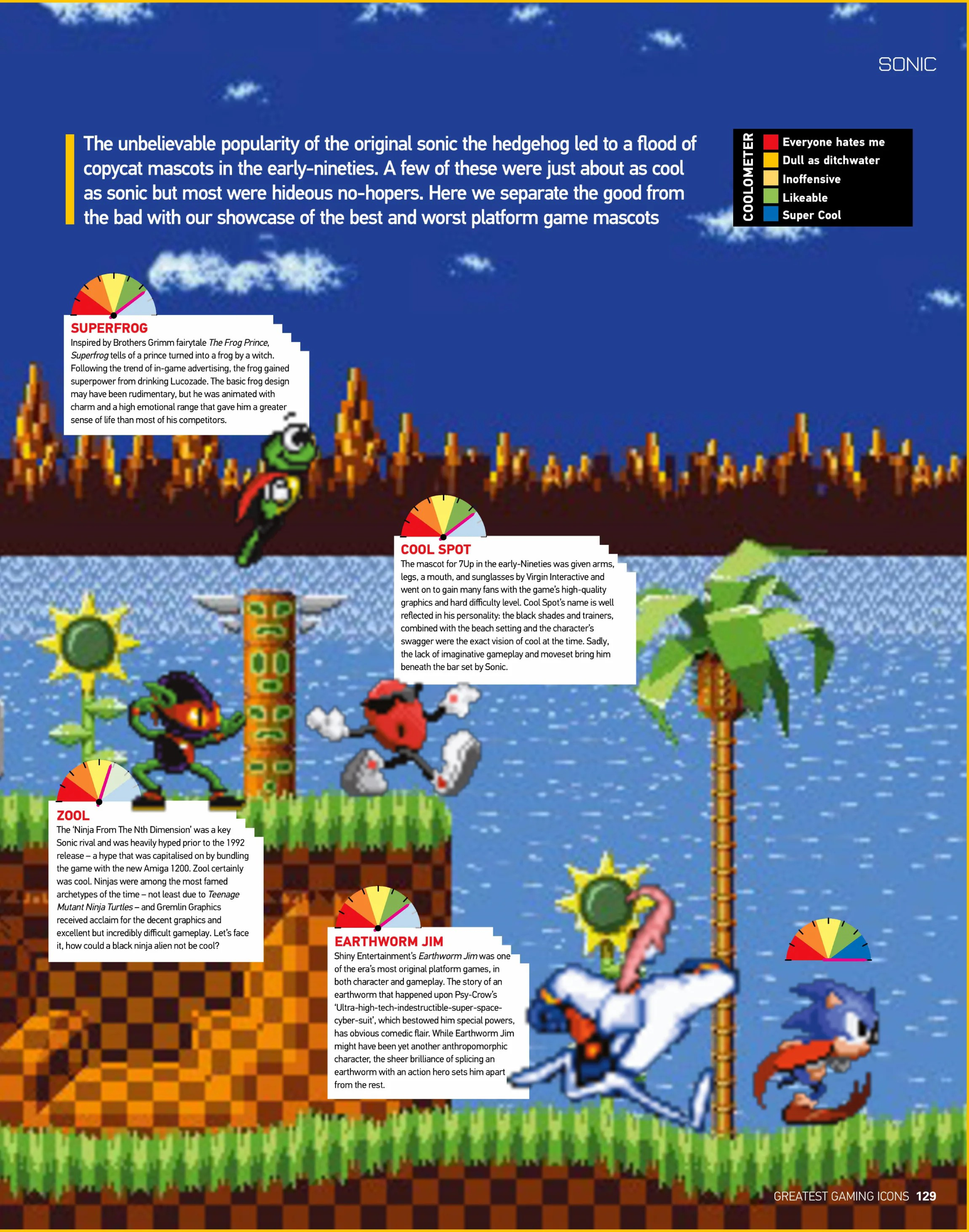
BUBSY THE BOBCAT

Bubsy The Bobcat was originally hyped as 'the next *Sonic The Hedgehog*' and in many ways it was. The similarities are obvious: the background graphics, the speed of play, the waterfalls and bridges all nodded to Sonic. He may have had Sonic's speed, sense of fun and adventure, and a sense of humour that the hedgehog lacked, but Bubsy never came close to Sonic's popularity. Bubsy ticked the same boxes as Sonic (except that he was far too easy to kill), but he was merely following in the blue one's wake.

The unbelievable popularity of the original sonic the hedgehog led to a flood of copycat mascots in the early-nineties. A few of these were just about as cool as sonic but most were hideous no-hopers. Here we separate the good from the bad with our showcase of the best and worst platform game mascots

COOLOMETER

🟥 Everyone hates me
🟧 Dull as ditchwater
🟨 Inoffensive
🟩 Likeable
🟦 Super Cool



SUPERFROG

Inspired by Brothers Grimm fairytale *The Frog Prince*, *Superfrog* tells of a prince turned into a frog by a witch. Following the trend of in-game advertising, the frog gained superpower from drinking Lucozade. The basic frog design may have been rudimentary, but he was animated with charm and a high emotional range that gave him a greater sense of life than most of his competitors.

COOL SPOT

The mascot for 7Up in the early-Nineties was given arms, legs, a mouth, and sunglasses by Virgin Interactive and went on to gain many fans with the game's high-quality graphics and hard difficulty level. Cool Spot's name is well reflected in his personality: the black shades and trainers, combined with the beach setting and the character's swagger were the exact vision of cool at the time. Sadly, the lack of imaginative gameplay and moveset bring him beneath the bar set by Sonic.

ZOOL

The 'Ninja From The Nth Dimension' was a key Sonic rival and was heavily hyped prior to the 1992 release – a hype that was capitalised on by bundling the game with the new Amiga 1200. Zool certainly was cool. Ninjas were among the most famed archetypes of the time – not least due to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* – and Gremlin Graphics received acclaim for the decent graphics and excellent but incredibly difficult gameplay. Let's face it, how could a black ninja alien not be cool?

EARTHWORM JIM

Shiny Entertainment's *Earthworm Jim* was one of the era's most original platform games, in both character and gameplay. The story of an earthworm that happened upon Psy-Crow's 'Ultra-high-tech-indestructible-super-space-cyber-suit', which bestowed him special powers, has obvious comedic flair. While Earthworm Jim might have been yet another anthropomorphic character, the sheer brilliance of splicing an earthworm with an action hero sets him apart from the rest.

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Street Fighter II: The World Warrior

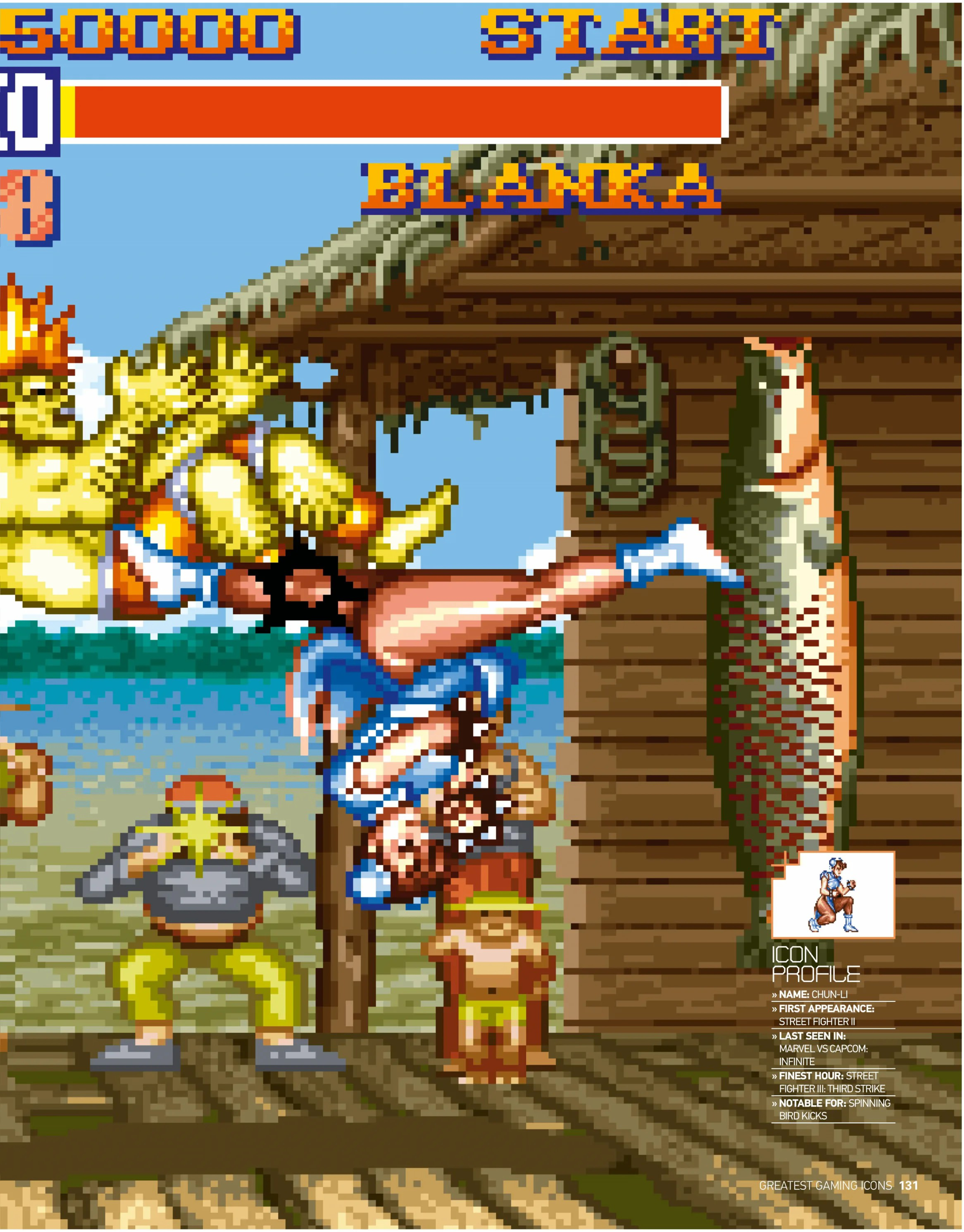
APPRECIATING GIRL POWER

» SNES » 1992 » CAPCOM

When I was growing up, *Street Fighter II* was a game that I would only get to play on special occasions – during trips to seaside arcades, or when I visited SNES-owning relatives – so my time with the game was always limited. Without time to try all the fighters I'd always just pick Ryu, since he wore a white gi like I did at karate, and therefore looked like a proper martial artist.

I never really began to appreciate the rest of the cast until I finally got to play against my cousin, who actually had two controllers. Being a bit older than me and the owner of the console, my cousin was able to wreck me swiftly and decisively, over and over again. After a little while, I began to get frustrated and started branching out into picking other characters. I finally thought I had my chance to win when I picked Blanka and my cousin chose Chun-Li. After all, I had a muscle-bound monster with green skin and sharp teeth, and he'd picked *a girl*. Surely she was just there for when your little sister wanted to play?

If you're thinking that my past self sounds like an idiot, you're completely right. But I wasn't even ten years old at the time, and at that point in my life, female characters in games just needed rescuing – and if they fought they were villains who needed weapons, like the whip-wielding enemies in *Double Dragon* and *Streets Of Rage*. They certainly weren't the heroes. But my cousin quickly dispelled that notion in my mind, as his capable guidance allowed Chun-Li to completely dismantle poor old Blanka with her superior mobility and lightning-fast kicks. She didn't even need the projectile attack she would get in later versions of *Street Fighter II*. I left my aunt's house humbled – and with a considerably more enlightened attitude towards women. ✱

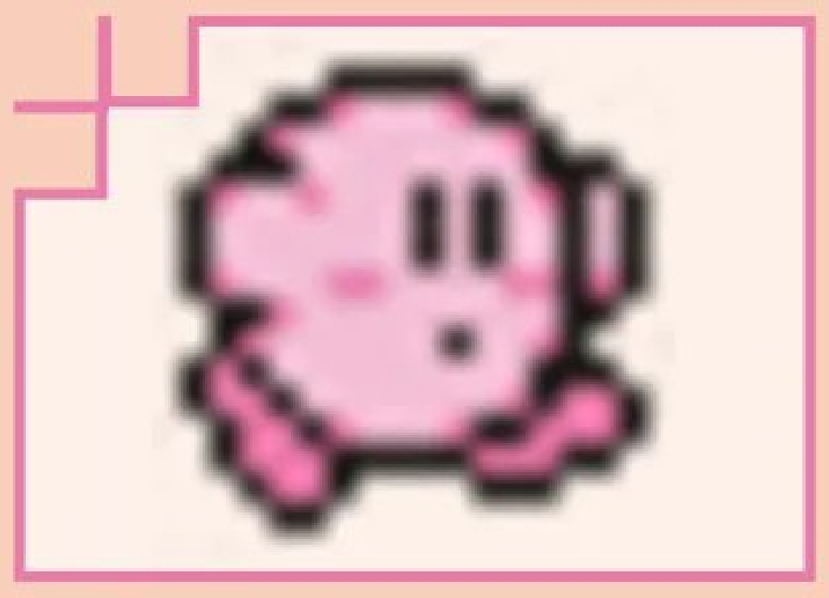


ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** CHUN-LI
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** STREET FIGHTER II
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** MARVEL VS CAPCOM: INFINITE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** STREET FIGHTER III: THIRD STRIKE
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** SPINNING BIRD KICKS

KIRBY

Discover how the childlike charms of a 20cm tall pink blob, originally destined for the trashcan, went on to conquer the world



ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** KIRBY
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** KIRBY'S DREAM LAND
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
- **» FINEST HOUR:** KIRBY: PLANET ROBOTBOT
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** COPYING ENEMIES

While working for second-party Nintendo developer HAL Laboratory, Masahrio Sakurai was given the job of creating a new Game Boy title suitable for those new to gaming. During the project, Sakurai needed to create a 'dummy' character that would later be filled in with graphics and code. The created dummy was, not surprisingly, very simple: a blob called Popopo. This sickeningly cute blob came to be loved by the development team, ensuring his survival, albeit with the new name Kirby. With the addition of arms, feet and some cheek blush, Kirby evolved somewhat, starring in his very first game, 1992's *Kirby's Dream Land*.

Kirby's character was designed with beginners and, particularly, younger gamers in mind. He is innocent and ceaselessly cheerful even in the face of doom. He loves nothing more than sleeping and eating – Maxim tomatoes being a favourite. His hobbies include singing, even though he is tone-deaf, and he is immature yet heroic. Put simply, Kirby is the personification of cute, the perfect character for newcomers to begin playing games with. *Kirby's Dream Land* also ensured comfort for its audience via a fairly easy difficulty level and basic, classic platforming gameplay. The traditional running and jumping, mixed with some suck-and-blow action, proved the simple joy Nintendo hoped for.

Needing to develop Kirby's audience to include more advanced gamers without alienating his original market, Nintendo sought to add flexibility to the game. Kirby's move set for *Dream Land* had only allowed him to inhale and spit out enemies, a fun but somewhat two-dimensional game dynamic. The inspiration for the now legendary NES title *Kirby's Adventure* came in the form of copying enemies' abilities and it is here that Kirby came into his own and found the gameplay angle upon which to base his now illustrious career. By sucking in certain power enemies, Kirby would acquire their move. This gave rise to some 28 powers, including ice, fire, a hammer and even a sword, making *Kirby's Adventure* a broad game, with a wealth of options – a true revolution.

> **"This sickeningly cute blob came to be loved by the development team"**

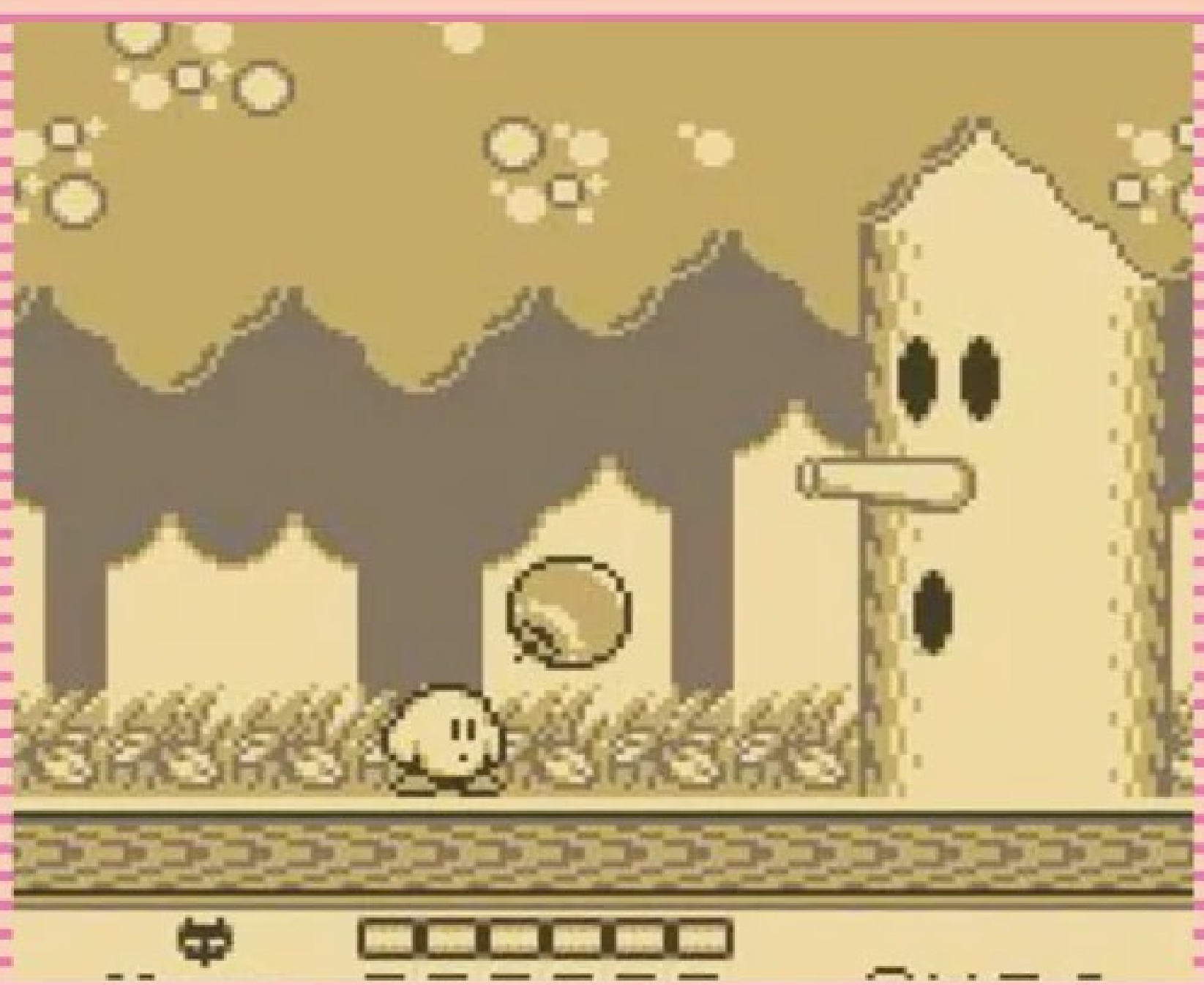
The pinnacle of the series came with the SNES release *Kirby Super Star* in 1996. *Super Star* was something of a gift, the bounteous collection of eight games in one, featuring a complete remake of *Kirby's Dream Land*, mini-games, a treasure-hunt game and a whole new adventure. Where *Kirby's Adventure* only allowed for one move per copy ability (excluding the UFO), *Super Star* gave Kirby multiple moves under one copy. It became an instant classic and still holds the mantle, for many, as the best *Kirby* game to date and near perfection of the 2D platformer. No wonder then, that *Super Star* was remade for Nintendo's DS.

No sooner was *Kirby's Dream Land* released than love for the pink blob grew, making him one of the fastest game icons to cross genres. In 1993 the self-explanatory *Kirby's Pinball Land* was released, the first non-platform title in what would be a very versatile line. Much like his peer Mario, Kirby has been involved in several genres, from *Puyo Puyo*-style puzzler *Kirby's Avalanche* to racing title *Kirby's Air Ride* and the beat-'em-up that needs no introduction, *Super Smash Bros*.

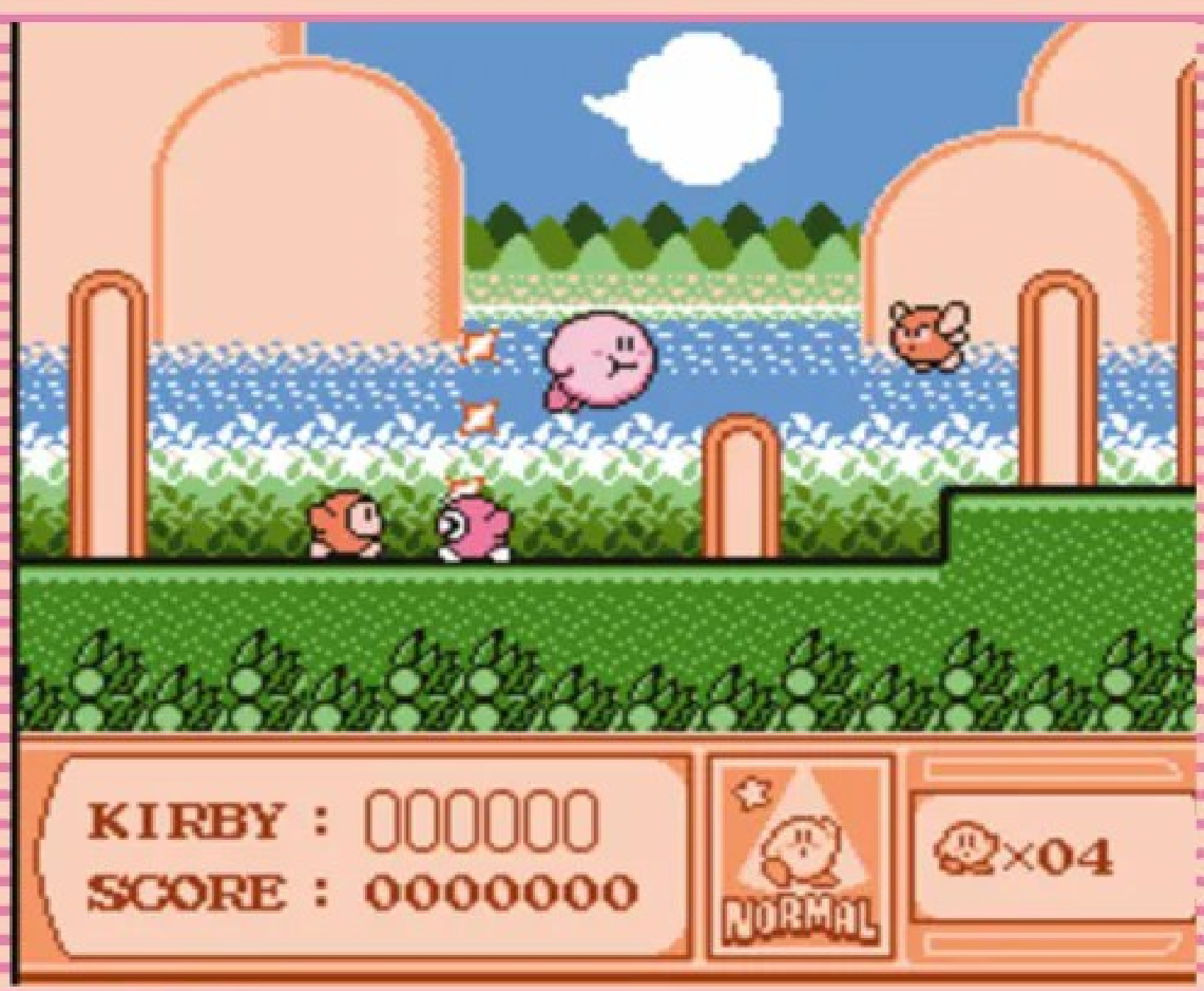
Kirby has also met success outside the gaming universe. The anime *Kirby: Right Back At Ya!*, finally gave some significance to the character's background. In the show, Kirby is a Star Warrior, fated to save the land of Pop Star from destruction. The anime explains Kirby's immaturity by stating that he was meant to sleep for a further 200 years but was awoken accidentally in his infancy. Kirby has also starred in several Japanese-only manga series, the longest running of which is *Kirby Of The Stars*. Several German comics also feature Kirby as a detective, with King Dedede as his friend, alongside a female Kirby who has several of his animal friends as pets. Purportedly, these German comics were designed to inform fans of upcoming releases in the country. Kirby is so loveable that he has even been used in a still-animated educational video to teach Kanji (Japanese writing characters) to young children in Japan.

Kirby may have originally been designed as a placeholder, to be removed by a graphically superior character, but his simple, childlike charms have indelibly stencilled his name into gaming legend. The recent release of *Kirby Star Allies* has once again seen the little pink blob sucking his way into the hearts of gaming fans all over the world. Not bad. Not bad at all. *

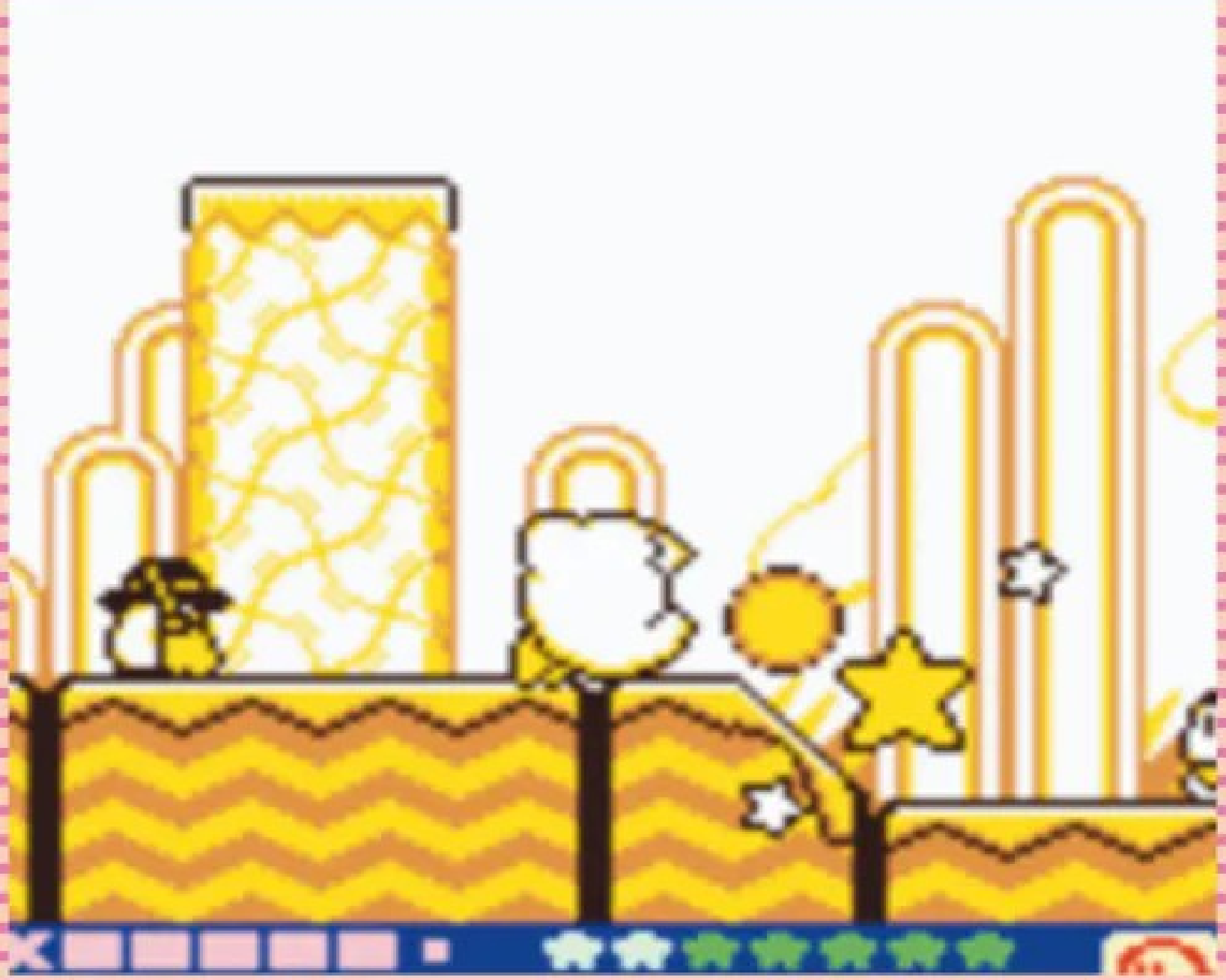
> MAGIC MOMENTS



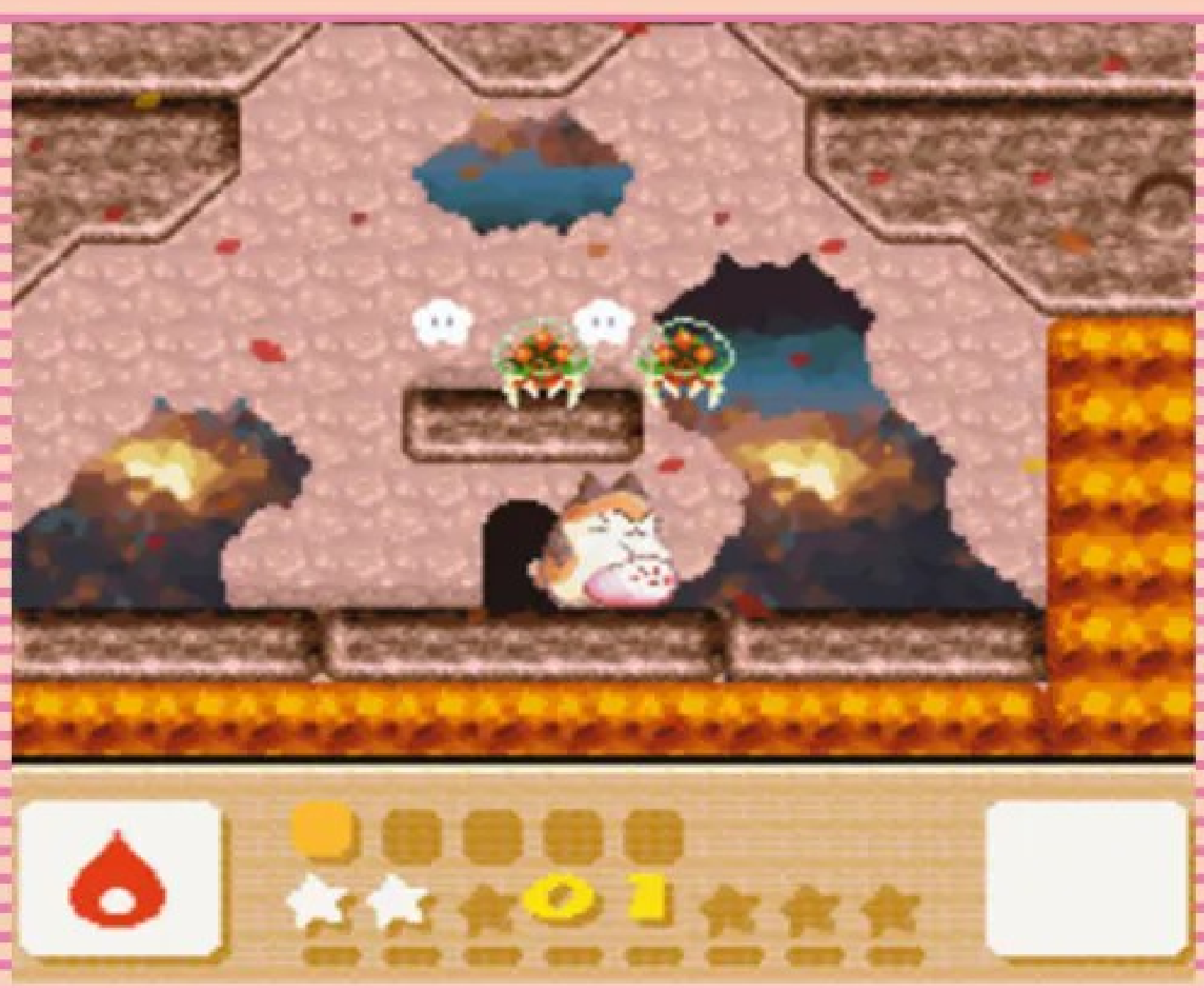
■ The original Game Boy release, *Kirby's Dream Land*, was simple yet very fun.



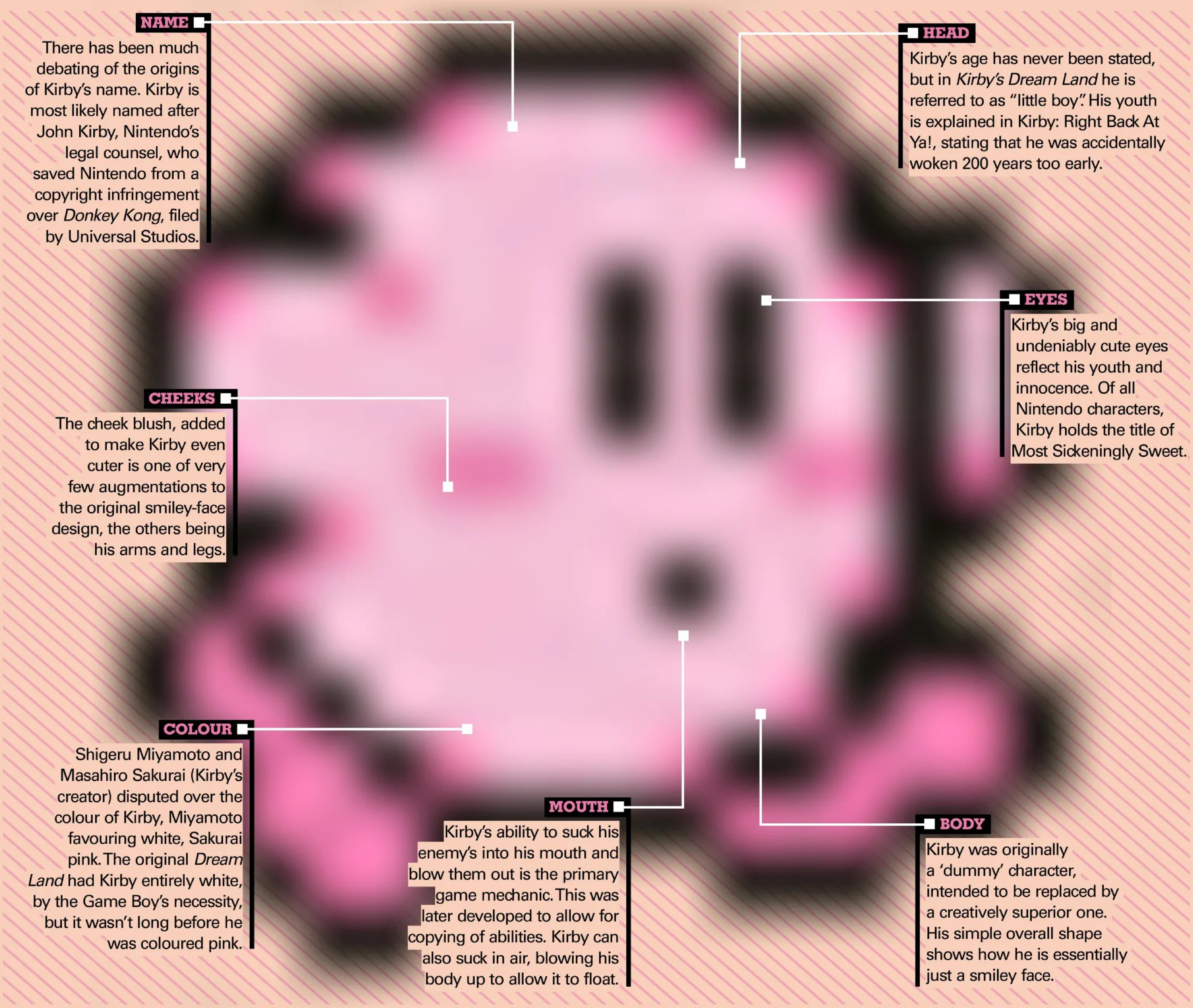
■ By adding the copying ability, Nintendo created yet another masterpiece with *Kirby's Adventure*.



■ *Dream Land 2* added Rick the hamster, Coo the owl and Kine the ocean sunfish.



■ *Kirby's Dream Land 3* included three more animal friends and a two-player mode.



NAME

There has been much debating of the origins of Kirby's name. Kirby is most likely named after John Kirby, Nintendo's legal counsel, who saved Nintendo from a copyright infringement over *Donkey Kong*, filed by Universal Studios.

HEAD

Kirby's age has never been stated, but in *Kirby's Dream Land* he is referred to as “little boy”. His youth is explained in Kirby: Right Back At Ya!, stating that he was accidentally woken 200 years too early.

EYES

Kirby's big and undeniably cute eyes reflect his youth and innocence. Of all Nintendo characters, Kirby holds the title of Most Sickeningly Sweet.

CHEEKS

The cheek blush, added to make Kirby even cuter is one of very few augmentations to the original smiley-face design, the others being his arms and legs.

COLOUR

Shigeru Miyamoto and Masahiro Sakurai (Kirby's creator) disputed over the colour of Kirby, Miyamoto favouring white, Sakurai pink. The original *Dream Land* had Kirby entirely white, by the Game Boy's necessity, but it wasn't long before he was coloured pink.

MOUTH

Kirby's ability to suck his enemy's into his mouth and blow them out is the primary game mechanic. This was later developed to allow for copying of abilities. Kirby can also suck in air, blowing his body up to allow it to float.

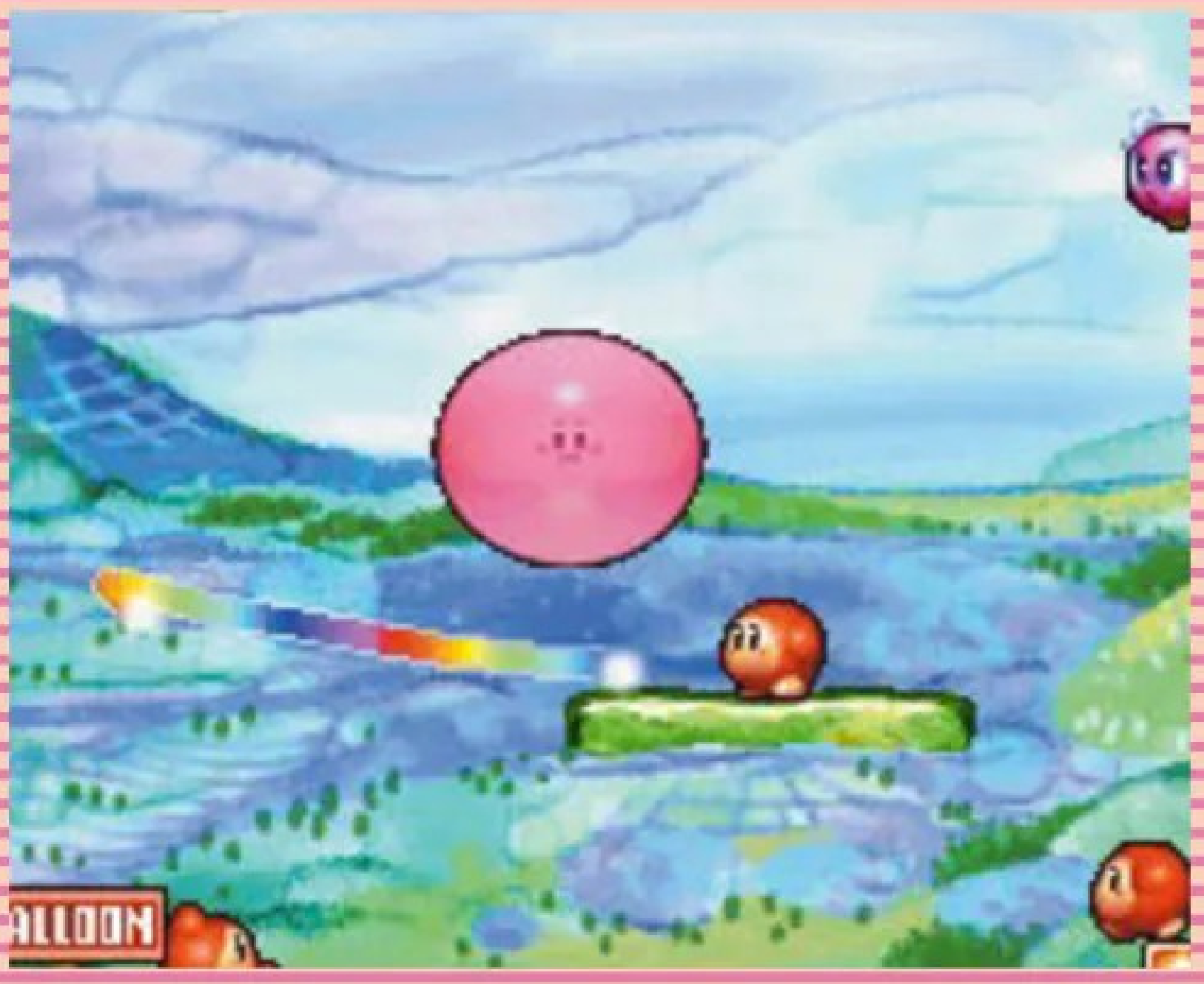
BODY

Kirby was originally a ‘dummy’ character, intended to be replaced by a creatively superior one. His simple overall shape shows how he is essentially just a smiley face.

■ *Kirby Super Star* features mini-games, a remake of *Dream Land* and a new adventure.

■ *Kirby 64: The Crystal Shards* uses ‘copy merging’, mixing two to create a new one.

■ GBA multiplayer *Kirby And The Amazing Mirror*'s maze altered level design.



■ *Kirby Power Paintbrush* uses the stylus to draw a road for Kirby. It's an inventive use of the DS.

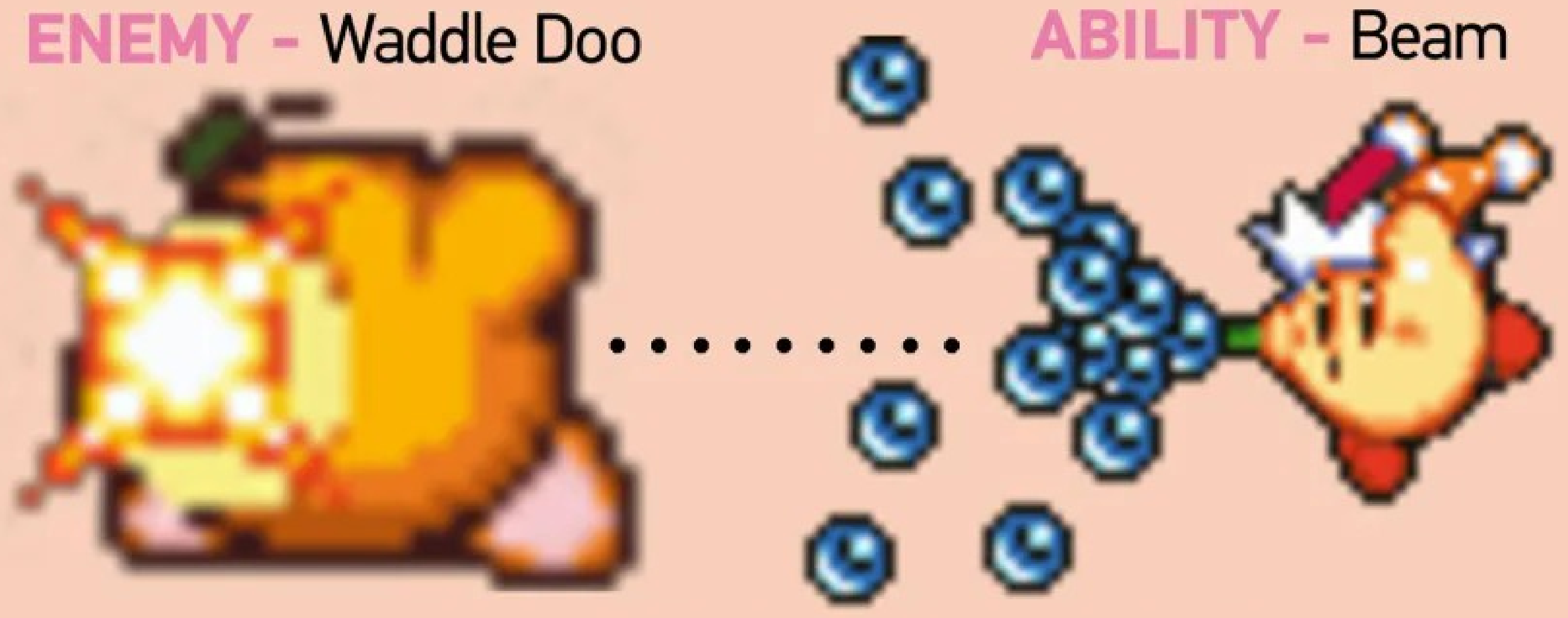
HALL OF FAME... KIRBY

SUPER STAR COPY ABILITIES

In a breath of ingenuity, Nintendo tore open Kirby's gaming mechanics for *Kirby's Adventure* with a wealth of abilities that appeased more advanced players while remaining true to the original's beginner market. This led Kirby to become one of the most versatile characters ever. In a sense, his versatility made *Kirby Super Star*, which featured 25 copy abilities, a kind of hybrid platformer. Throughout the 2D platform market, the essential running and jumping aspect has remained the same, the uniqueness of titles often coming from the character and their abilities. Kirby essentially moulded all characters and abilities into one. He has the wheel move reminiscent of Sonic, the projectile moves akin to action-platform titles, numerous beat-'em-up fighting styles, a jet-pack nodding to sci-fi, a hammer similar to Ice Climber, a bomb, ice, sword, stone… what else could a platform fan want? Kirby may be young and tiny but he still has the moves.

ENEMY - Waddle Doo

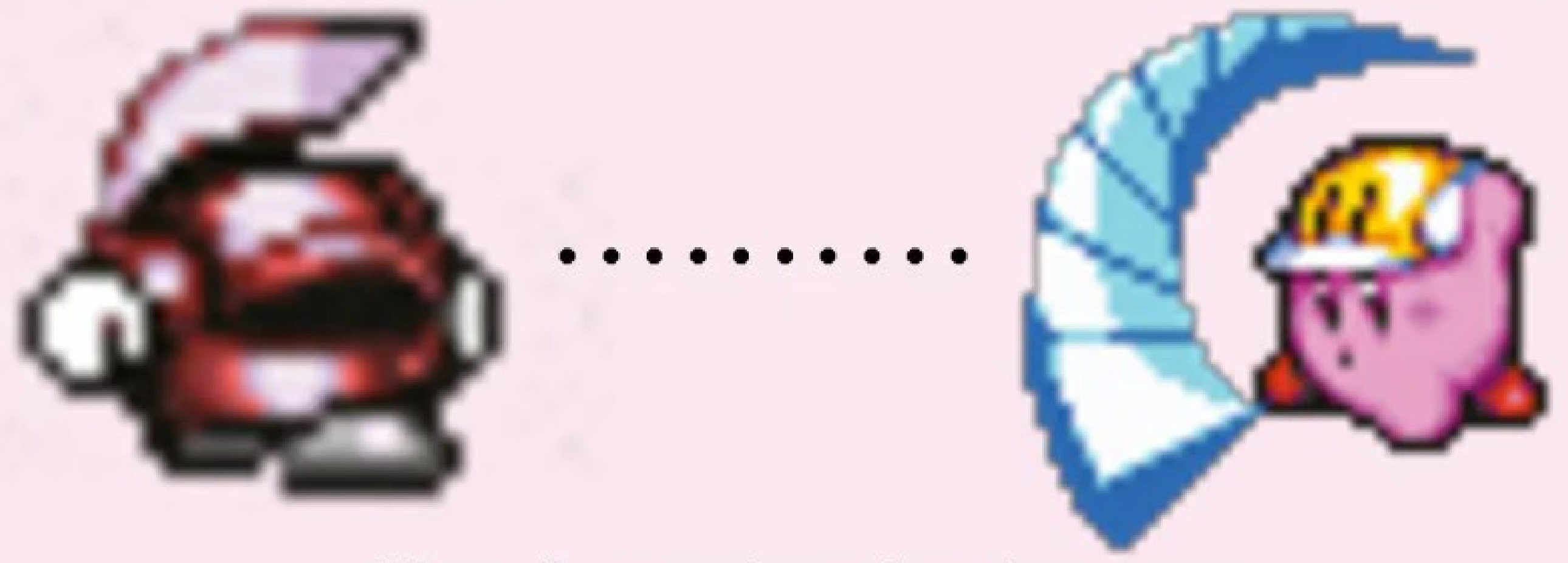
ABILITY - Beam



A beam that can be shot like a machine gun or used to capture enemies

ENEMY - Poppy Bros Cutter

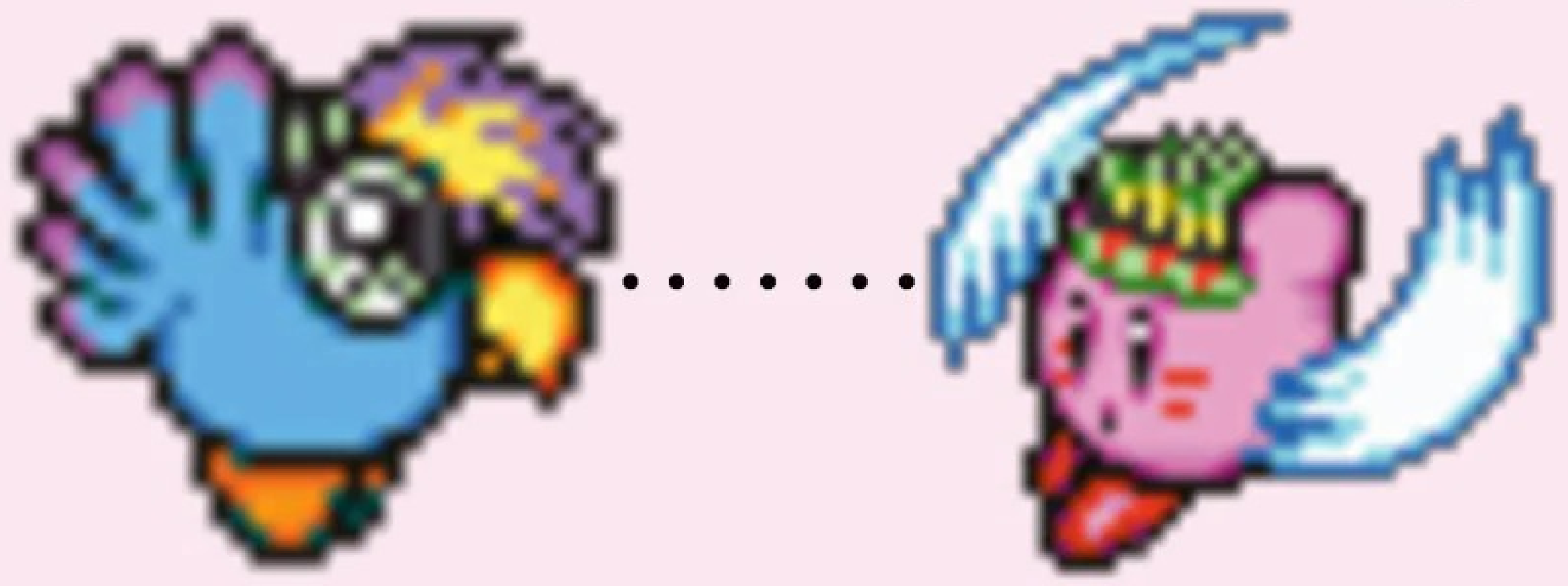
ABILITY - Cutter



Allows for a variety of cutting moves and can also be used as a boomerang

ENEMY - Birdon

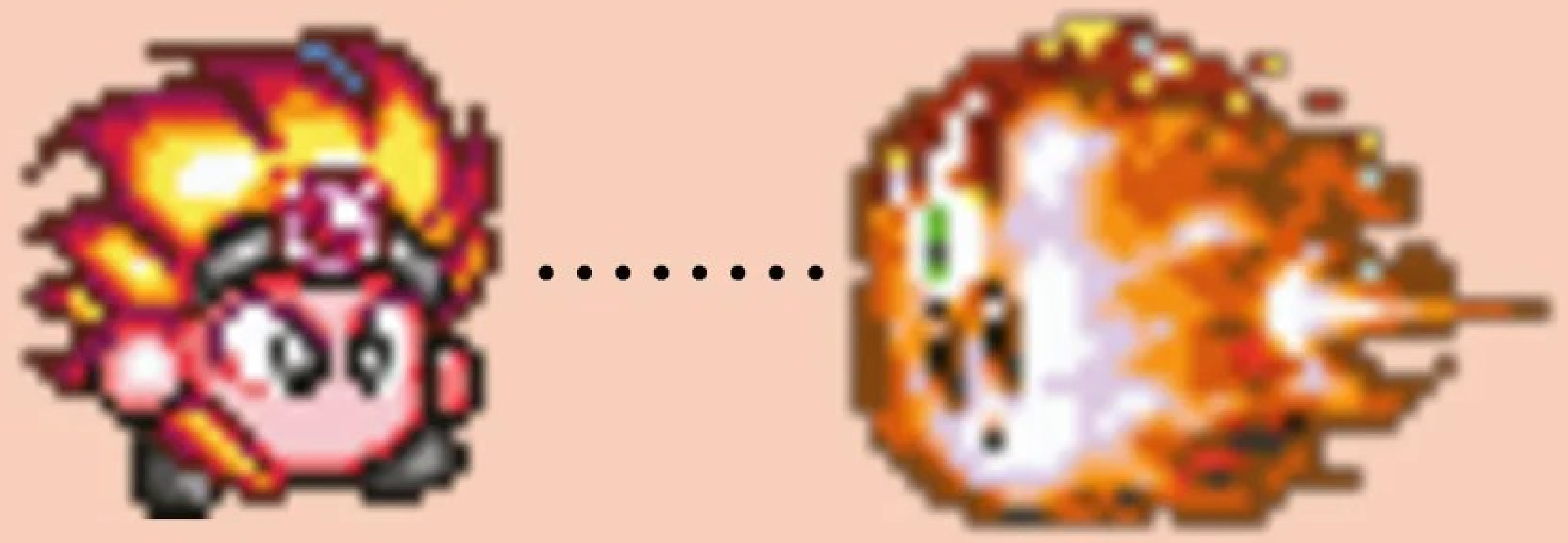
ABILITY - Wing



The wing can be used as a projectile or to flutter in the air

ENEMY - Burnin' Leo

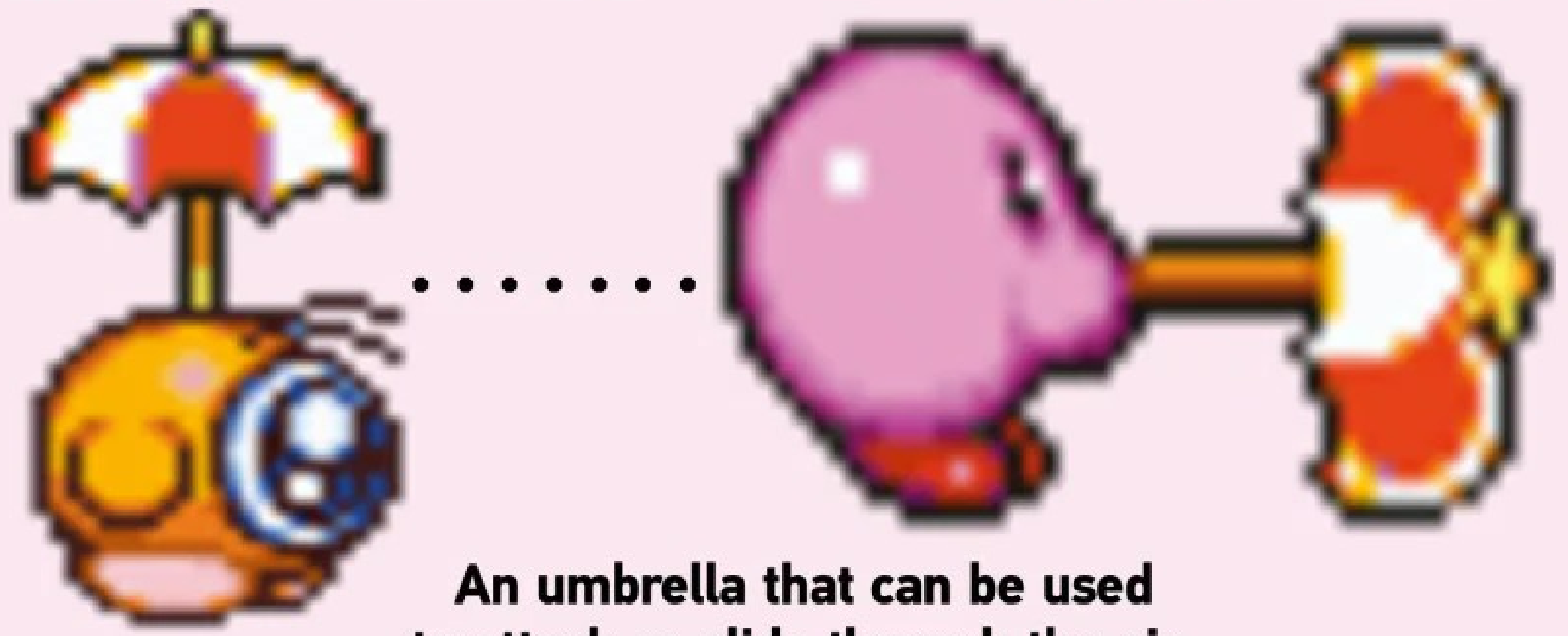
ABILITY - Fire



Kirby can throw fireballs or perform a burning dash attack

ENEMY - Parasol Dee

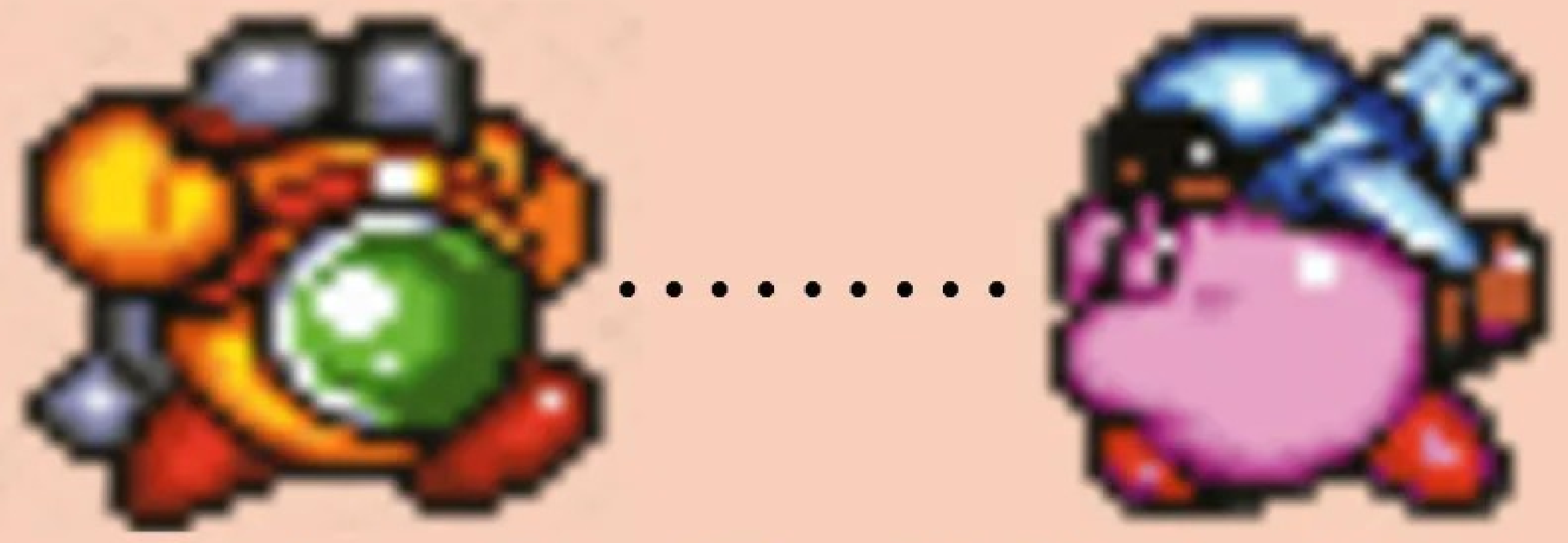
ABILITY - Parasol



An umbrella that can be used to attack or glide through the air

ENEMY - Capsule J

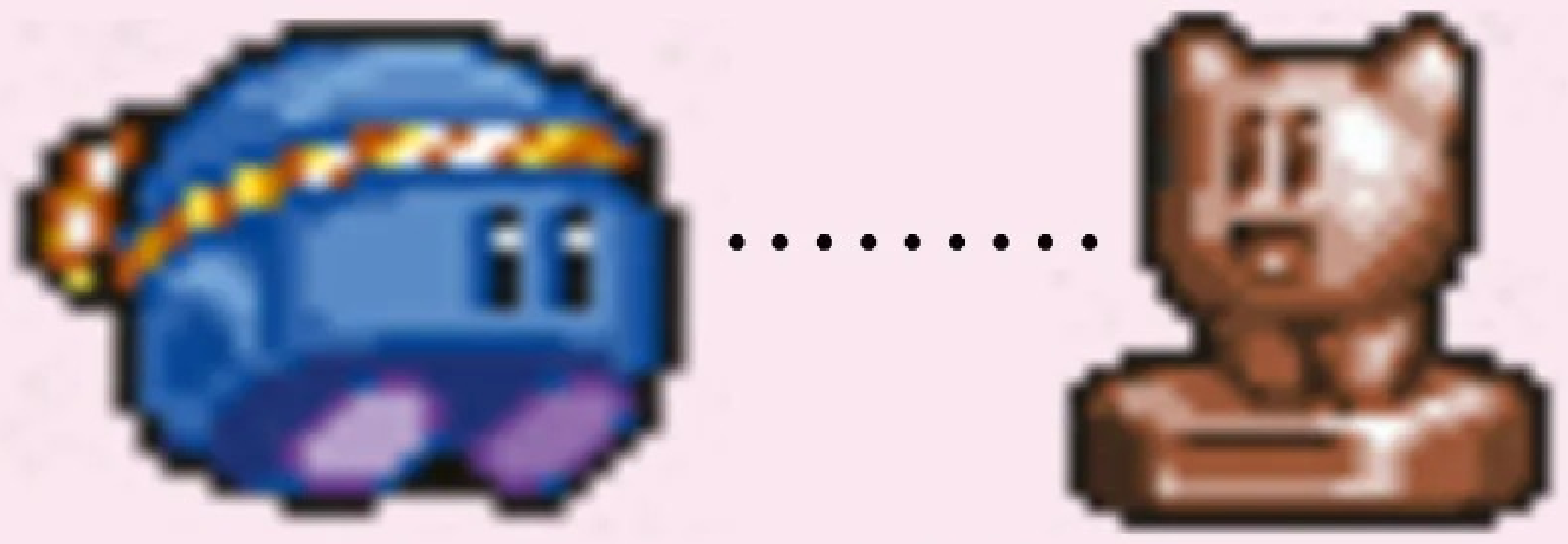
ABILITY - Jet



A jet-pack that can elevate Kirby and dash him through the air.

ENEMY - Rocky

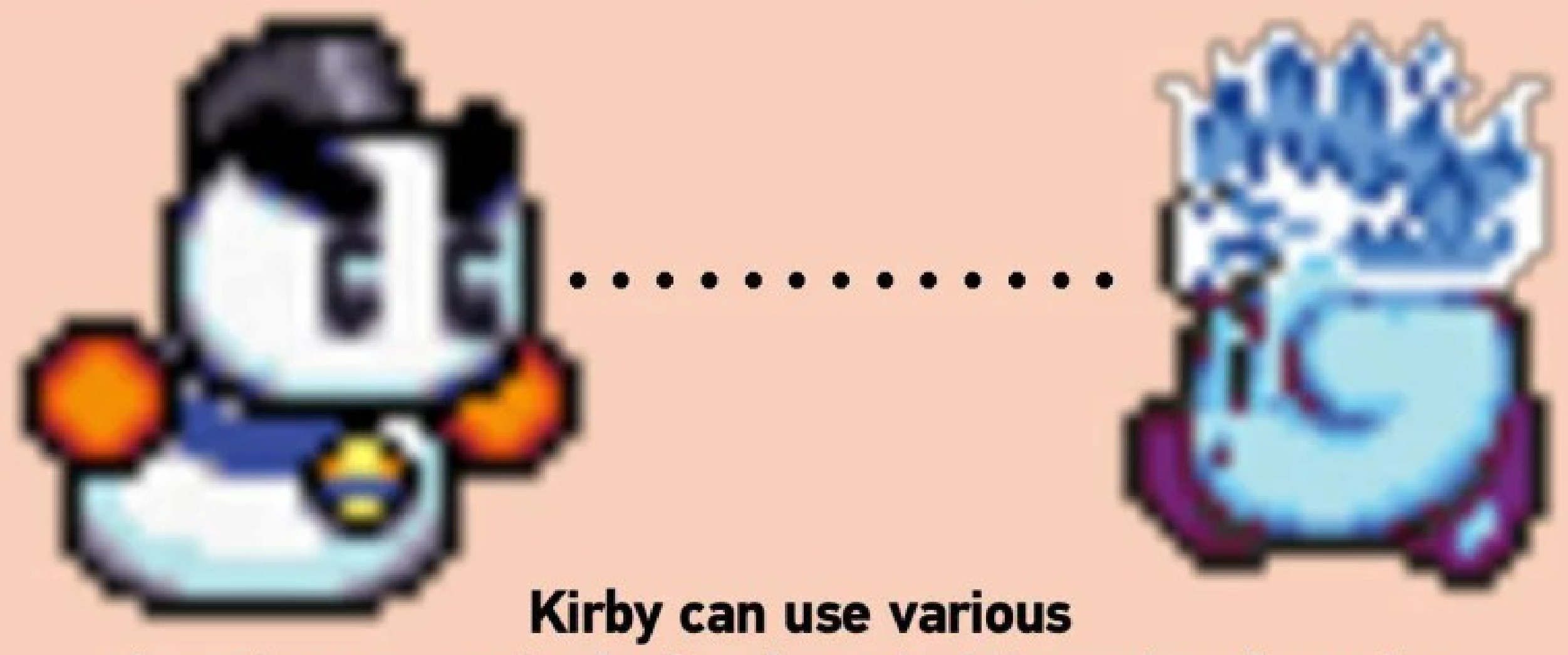
ABILITY - Stone



Kirby can become an invincible statue or smash his opponents

ENEMY - Chilly

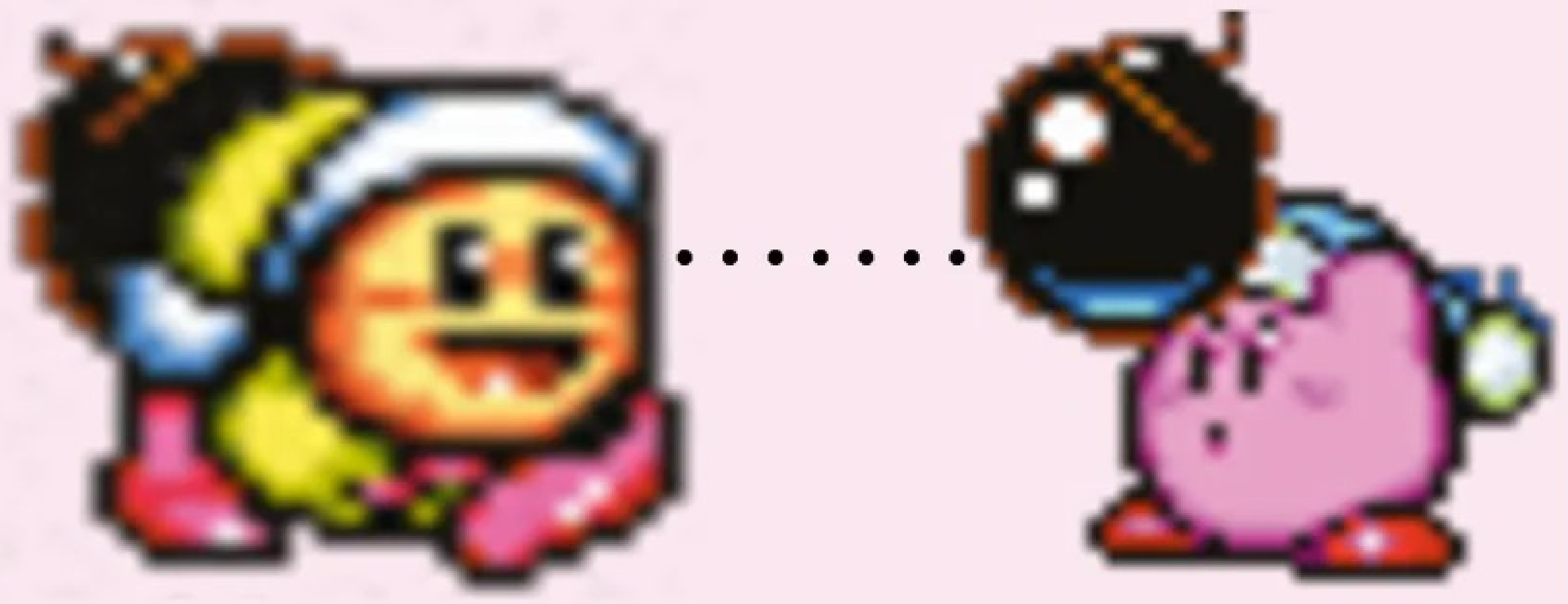
ABILITY - Ice



Kirby can use various freezing moves including breath, blizzard and suction

ENEMY - Donut Bomber

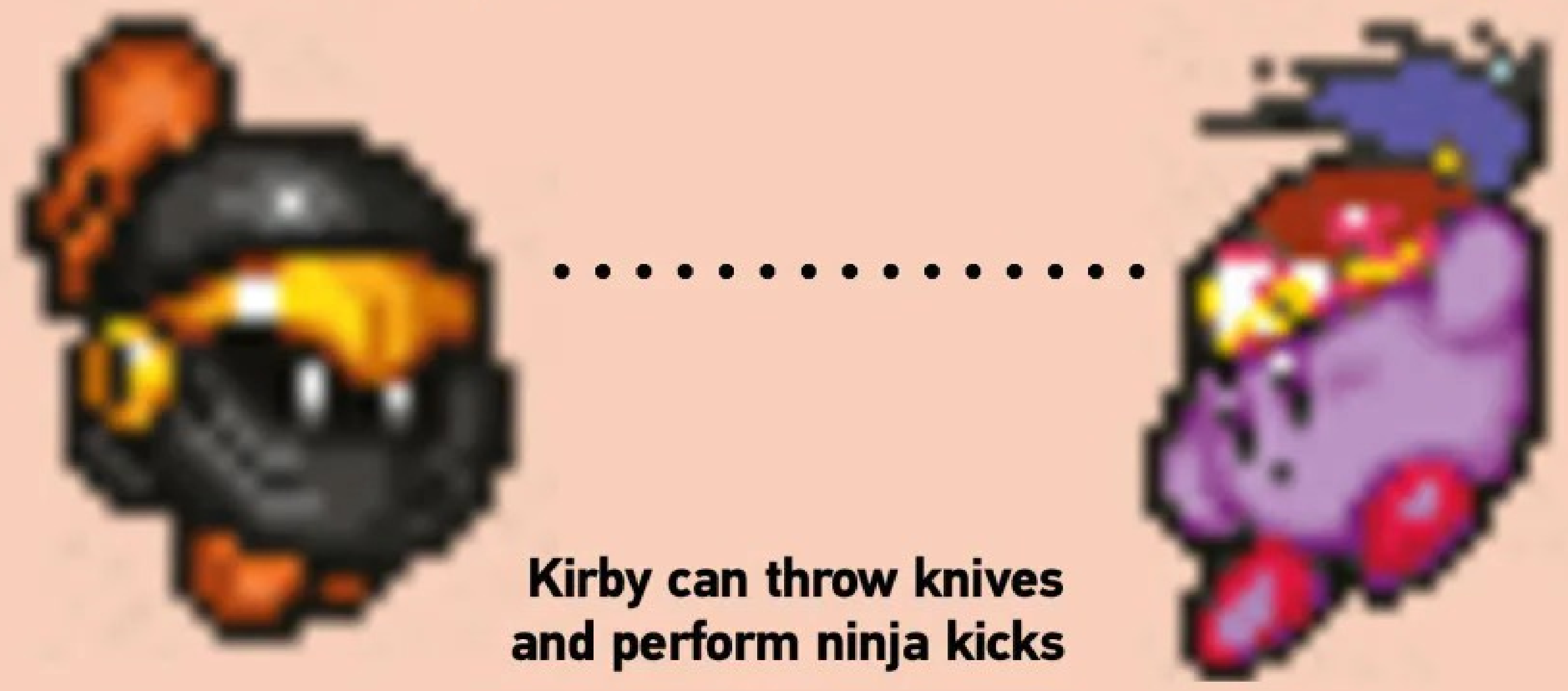
ABILITY - Bomb



Allows bombs to be set or thrown, a là Bomberman

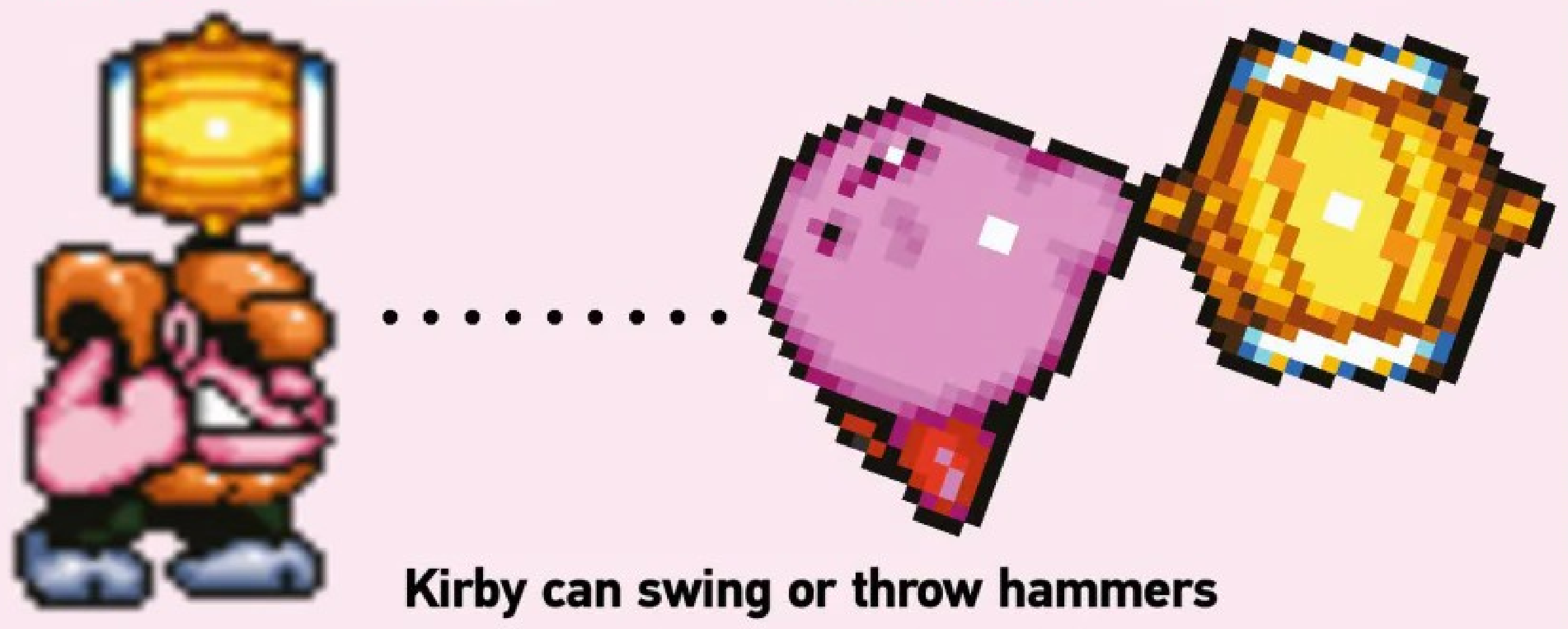
ENEMY - Bio Spark

ABILITY - Ninja



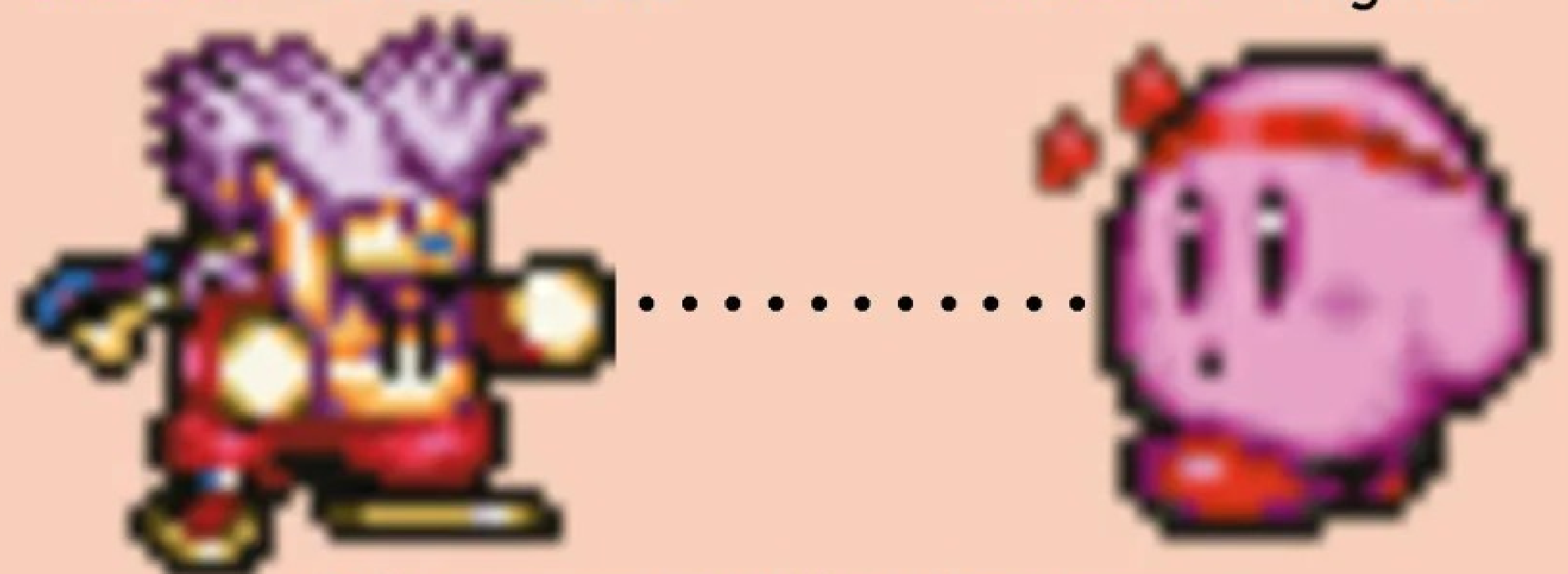
Kirby can throw knives and perform ninja kicks

ENEMY - Bonkers **ABILITY** - Hammer



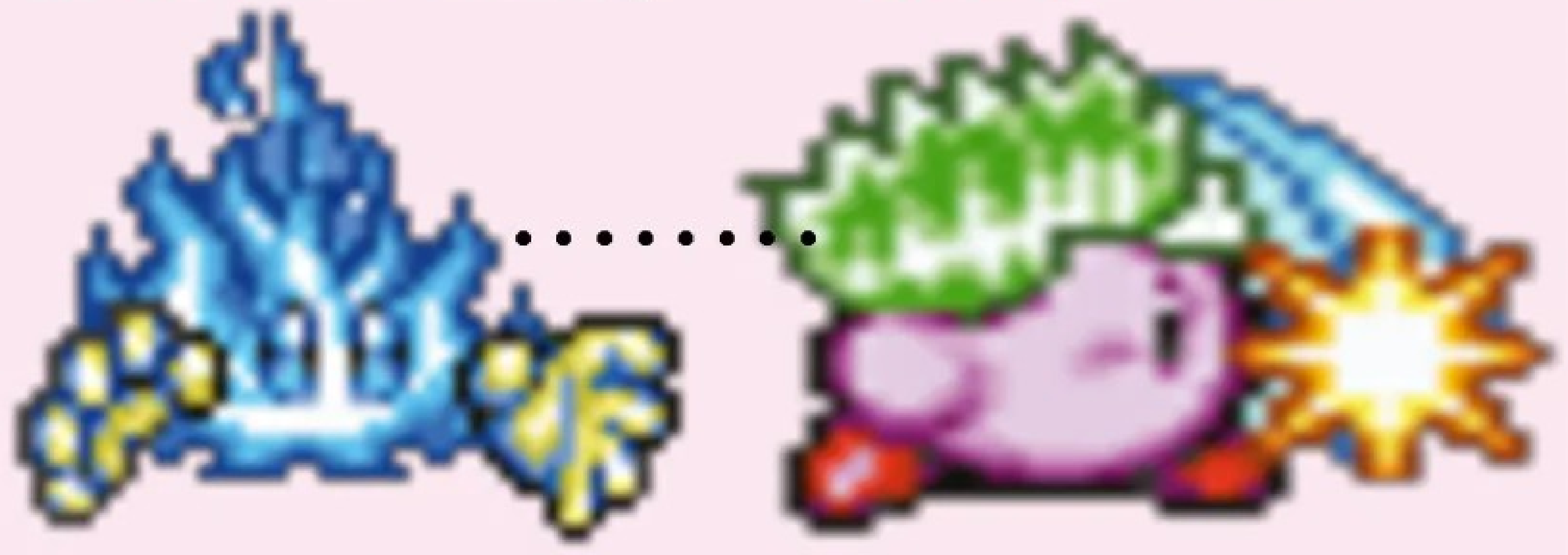
Kirby can swing or throw hammers

ENEMY - Knuckles Joe **ABILITY** - Fighter



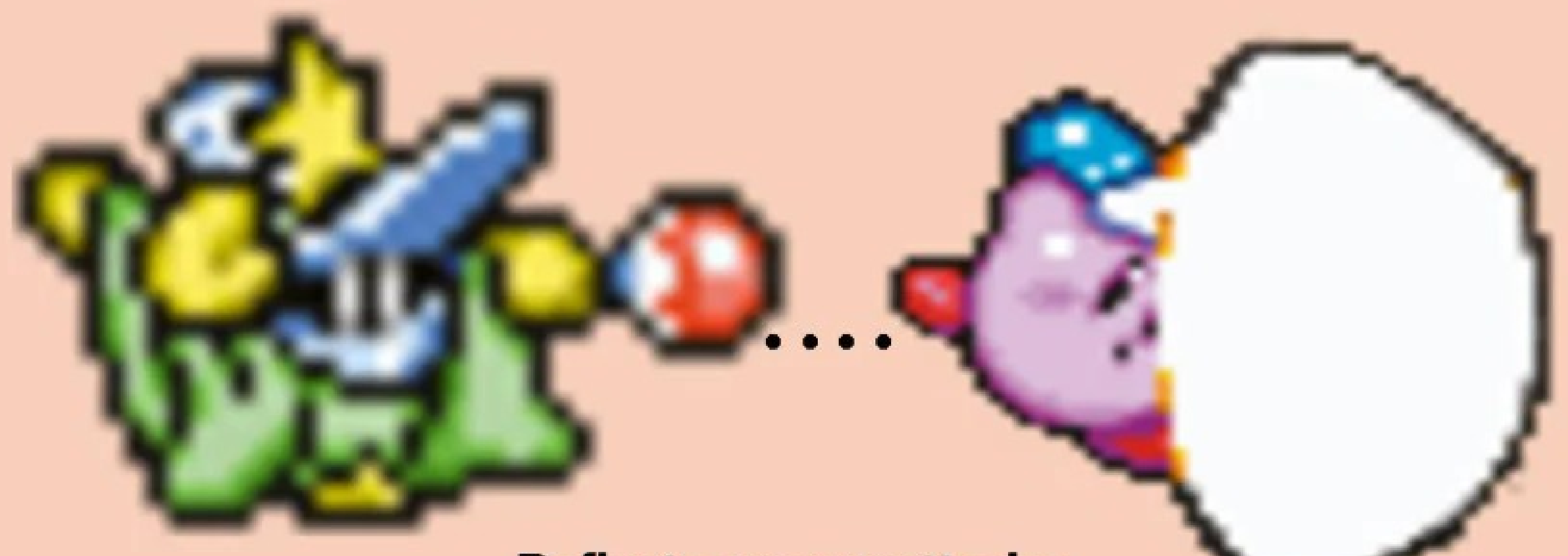
Kirby can use typical beat-'em-up moves

ENEMY - Plasma Wisp **ABILITY** - Plasma



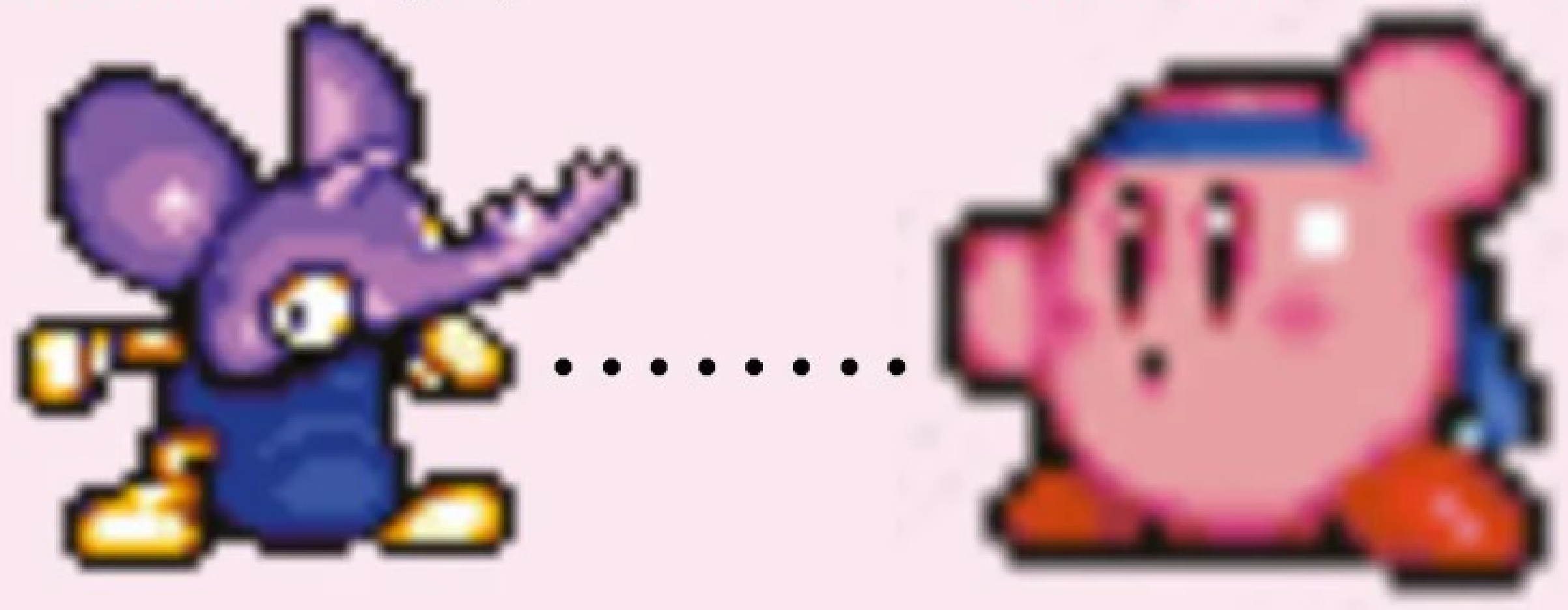
A plasma beam. Typical projectile attack

ENEMY - Simirror **ABILITY** - Mirror



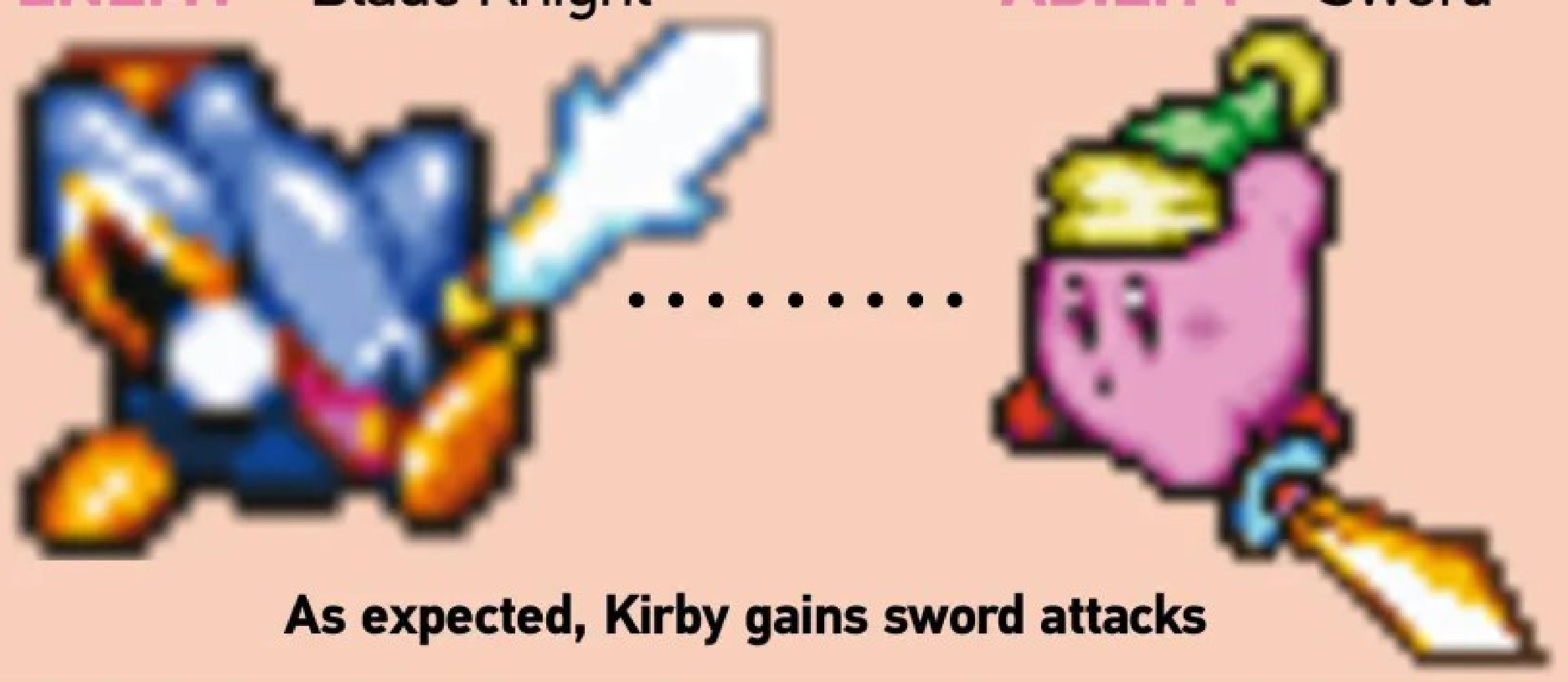
Reflects enemy attacks

ENEMY - Bugzzy **ABILITY** - Suplex



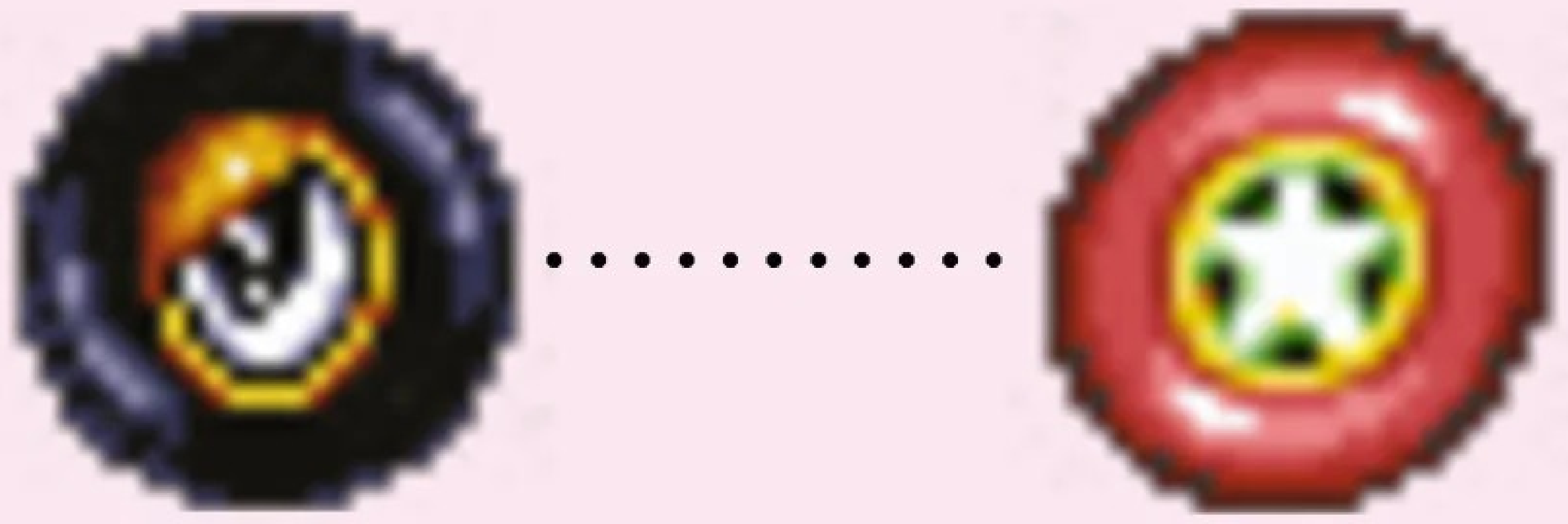
Turns the cute one into a wrestler

ENEMY - Blade Knight **ABILITY** - Sword



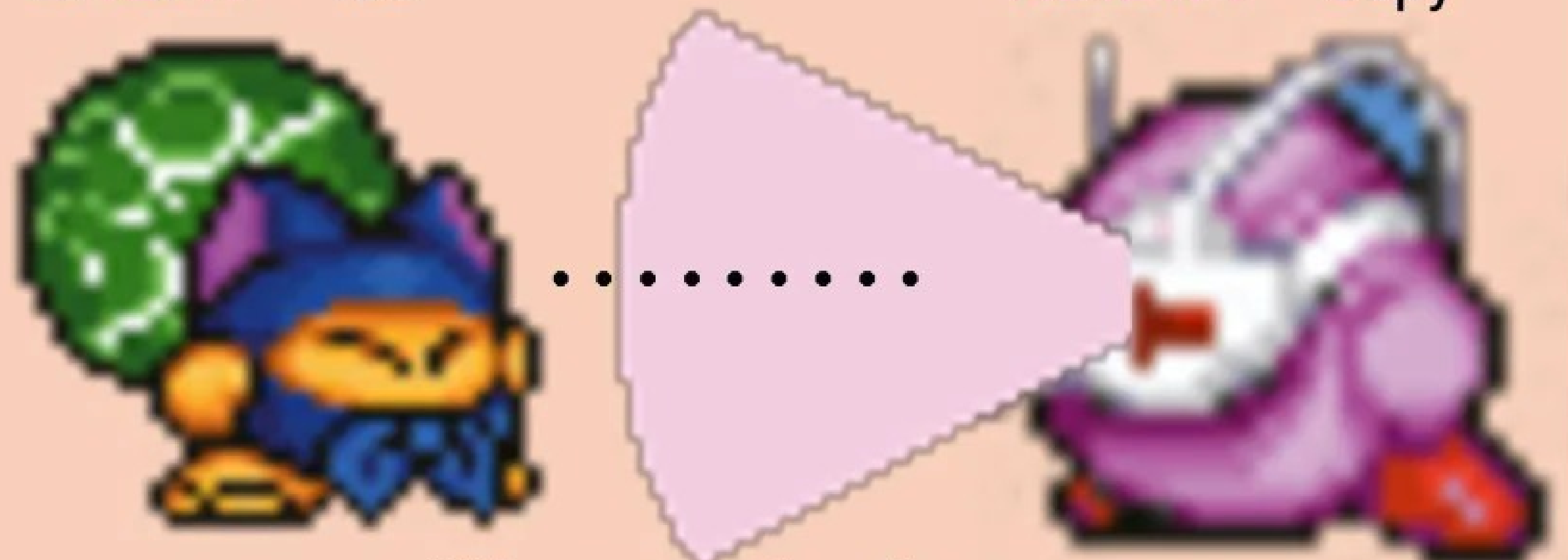
As expected, Kirby gains sword attacks

ENEMY - Wheelie **ABILITY** - Wheel



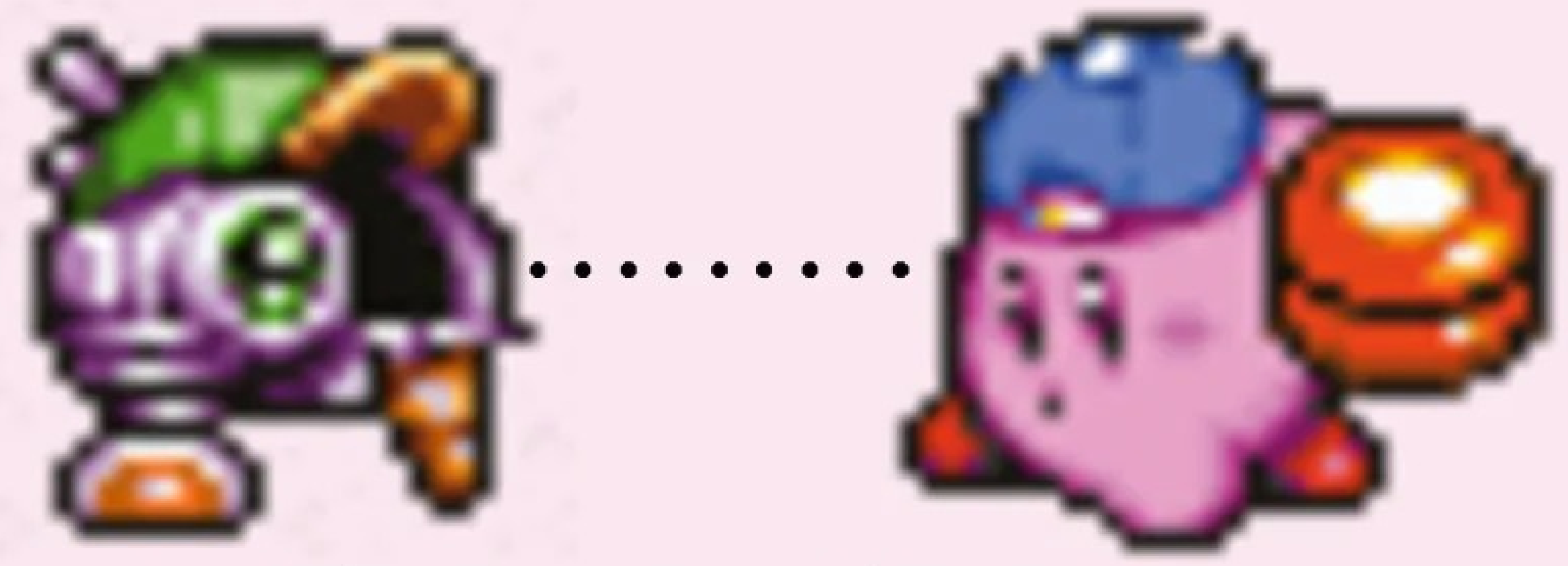
Kirby does a Sonic, rolling over enemies

ENEMY - Tac **ABILITY** - Copy



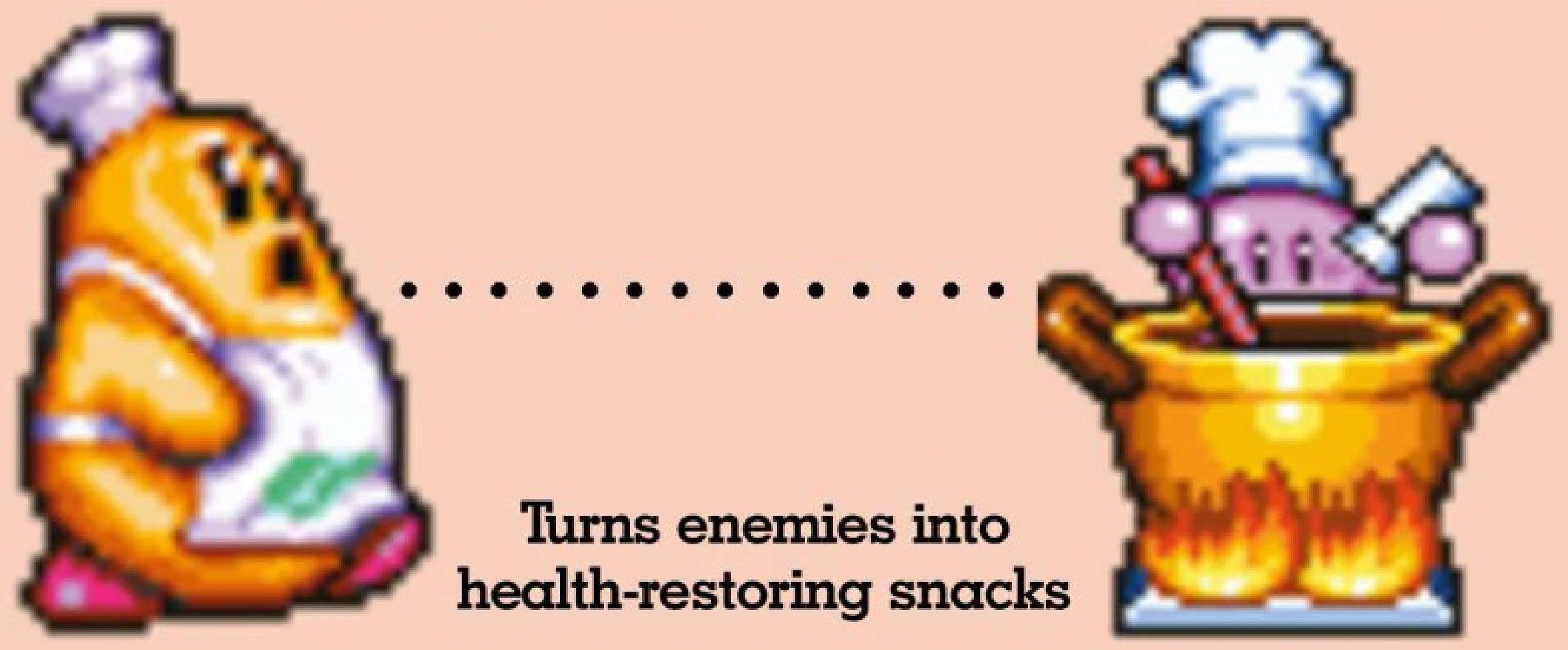
Kirby can turn into the enemy

ENEMY - Gim **ABILITY** - Yo-yo



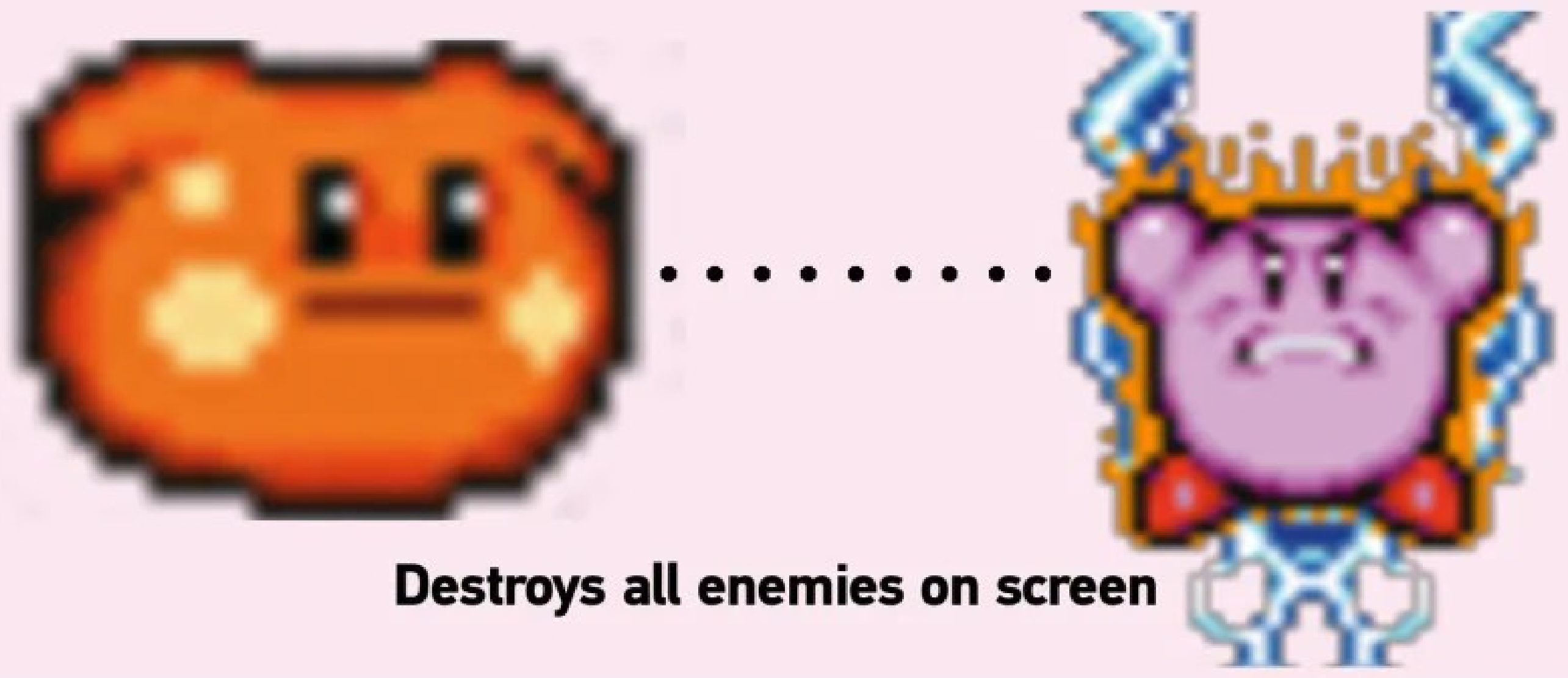
Kirby swings a yo-yo at his opponents

ENEMY - Chef Kawasaki **ABILITY** - Cook



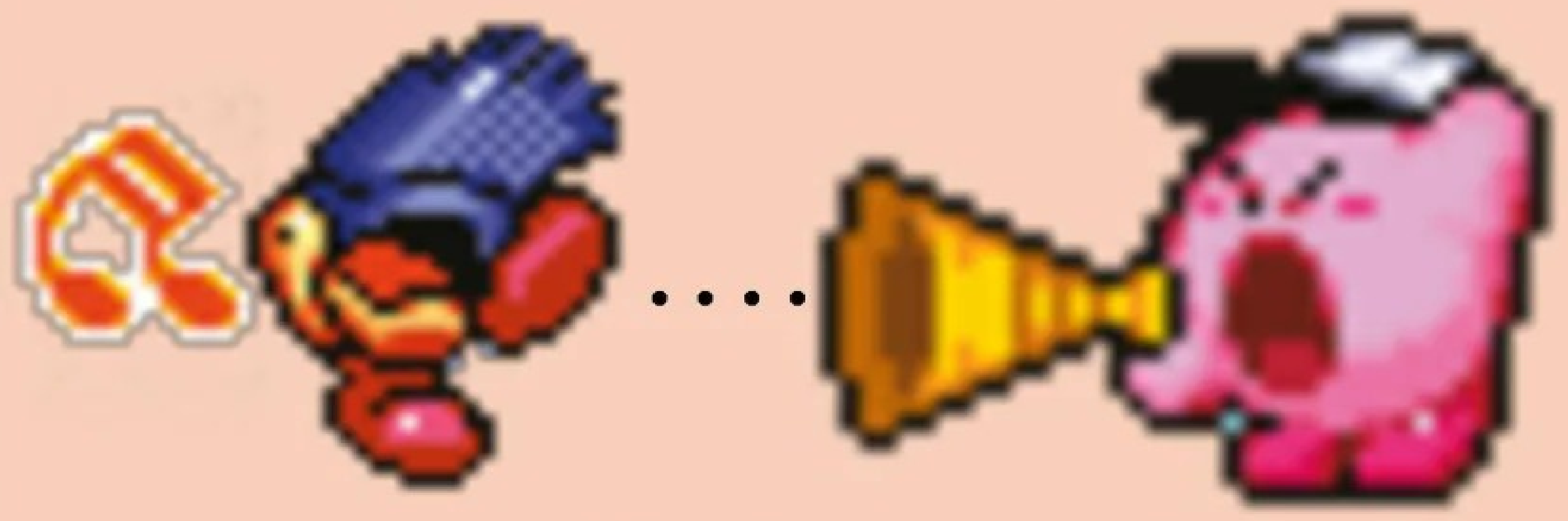
Turns enemies into health-restoring snacks

ENEMY - Scarfy **ABILITY** - Crash



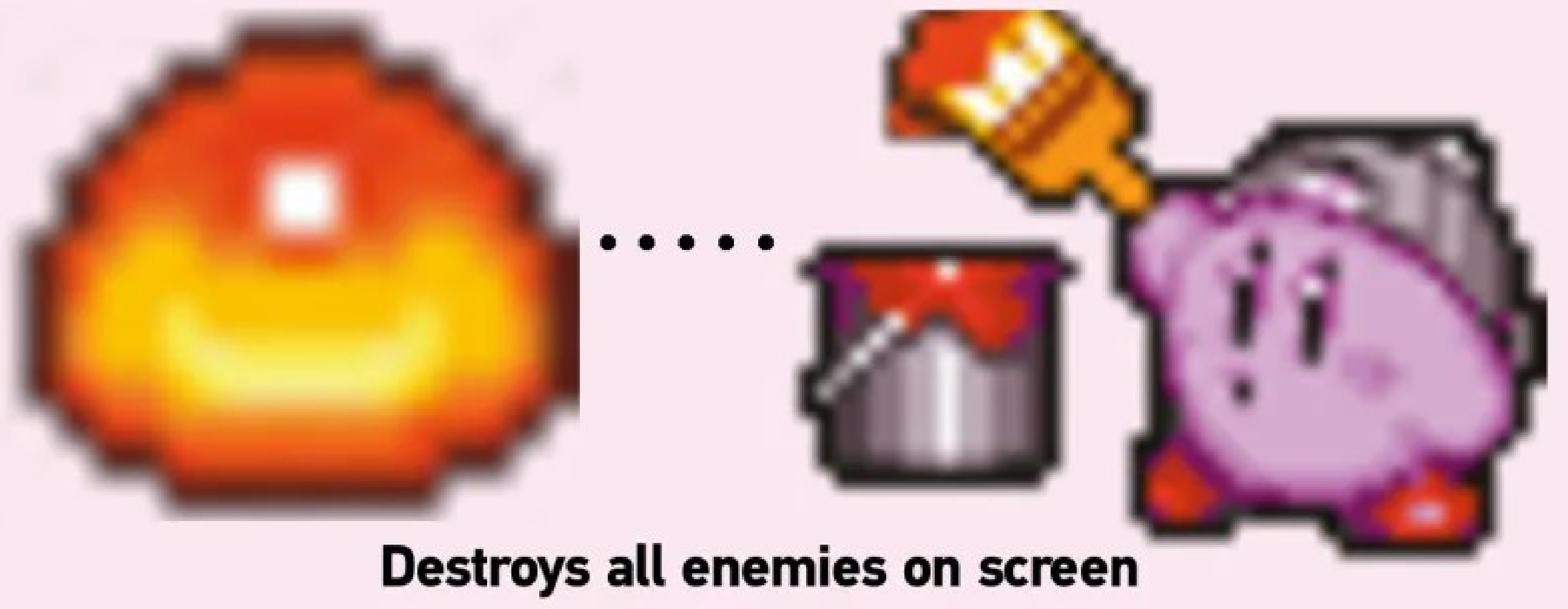
Destroys all enemies on screen

ENEMY - Mike **ABILITY** - Mic



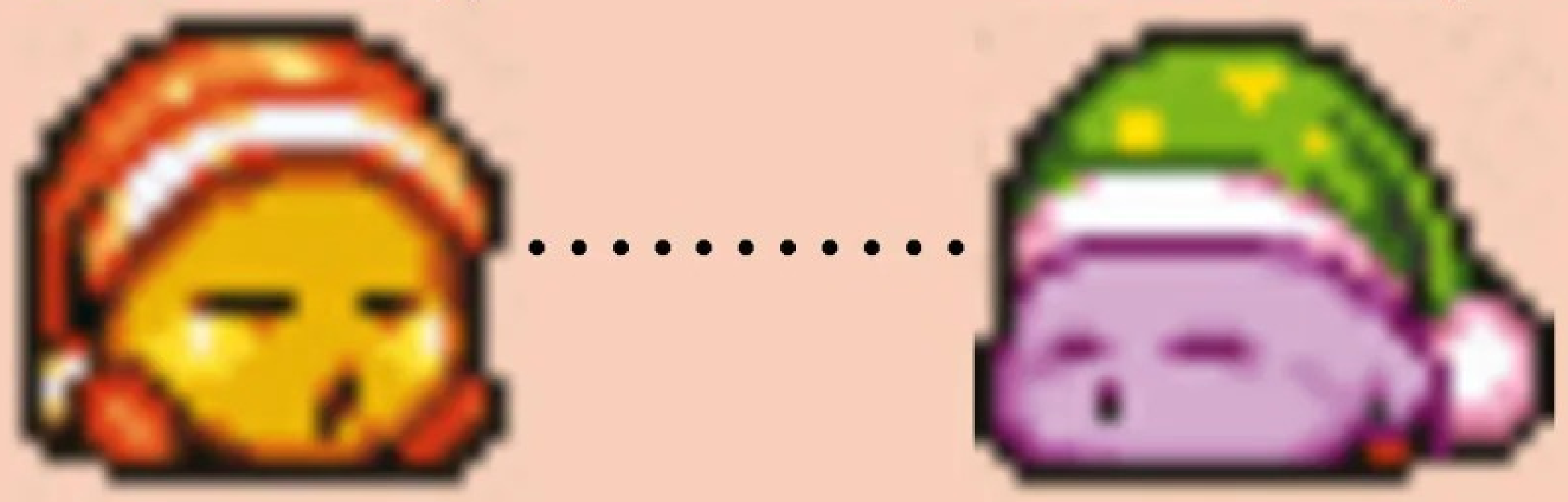
Tone-deaf Kirby's such a bad singer it hurts

ENEMY - Pain Blobi **ABILITY** - Paint



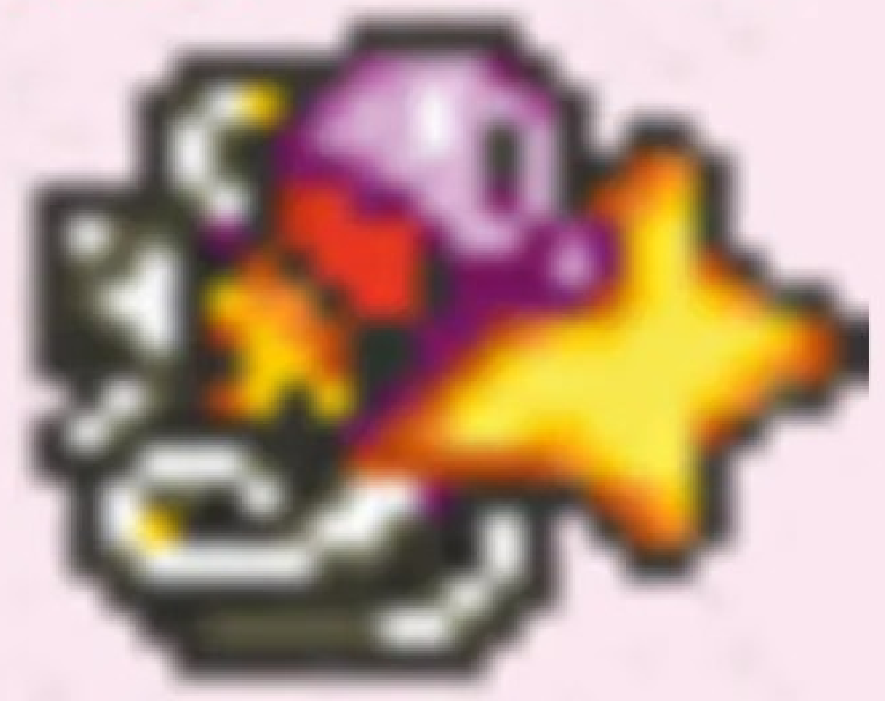
Destroys all enemies on screen

ENEMY - Sleepy **ABILITY** - Sleep



Sends Kirby to sleep – not much help

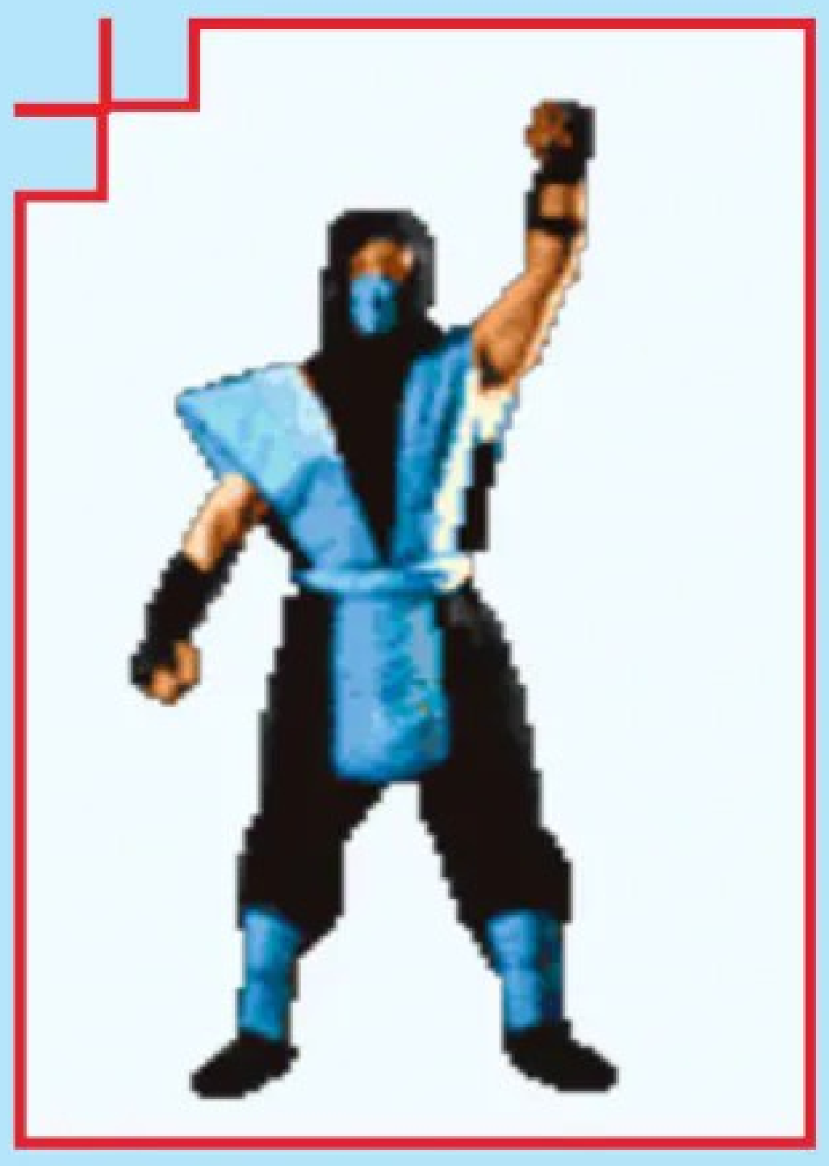
ABILITY - Star Chariot



Kirby rides a star to destroy Nova at the game's end

SUB-ZERO

He may not be Mortal Kombat's main protagonist, but he has proved a favourite. Maybe because he can create ice creams at will…



ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** SUB-ZERO
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** MORTAL KOMBAT
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** MORTAL KOMBAT 11
- **» FINEST HOUR:** MORTAL KOMBAT II
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** SPINE RIPS

As with all beat-'em-ups, on the surface *Mortal Kombat* appears to have a very shallow storyline, but those willing to look deeper into a character than simply learning their specials may be richly rewarded. The story of *Mortal Kombat* begins millennia before the first game, with the existence of two types of being: the Elder Gods and the One Being. The One Being was considered a threat by the Elder Gods because he'd been draining their power and growing in strength. To quench the threat, the Elder Gods created six weapons, known as the Kamidogu, which they used to defeat the One Being. The One Being then split into the six pieces and developed throughout the years into six realms – Earthrealm, Netherrealm, Outworld, Orderrealm, Chaosrealm, and Edenia – each with a Kamidogu that held the essence of that realm. Even at this most early premise, *Mortal Kombat* has derived ideas from three of the world's most notable philosophies. The One Being, for example, is based on Pangu the first living being and creator of all in Chinese mythology. The realms are representative of various Holy Lands: the Netherrealm is based on Di Yu, the Chinese Picture of Hell, while the Orderrealm and Chaosrealm are from the yin and yang of Taoism. This is but the beginning of a huge story inspired by the world's oldest and most important mythologies and philosophies, a story in which almost every character's origin can be traced to some legendary text. For Sub-Zero, this revolves around the Lin Kuei.

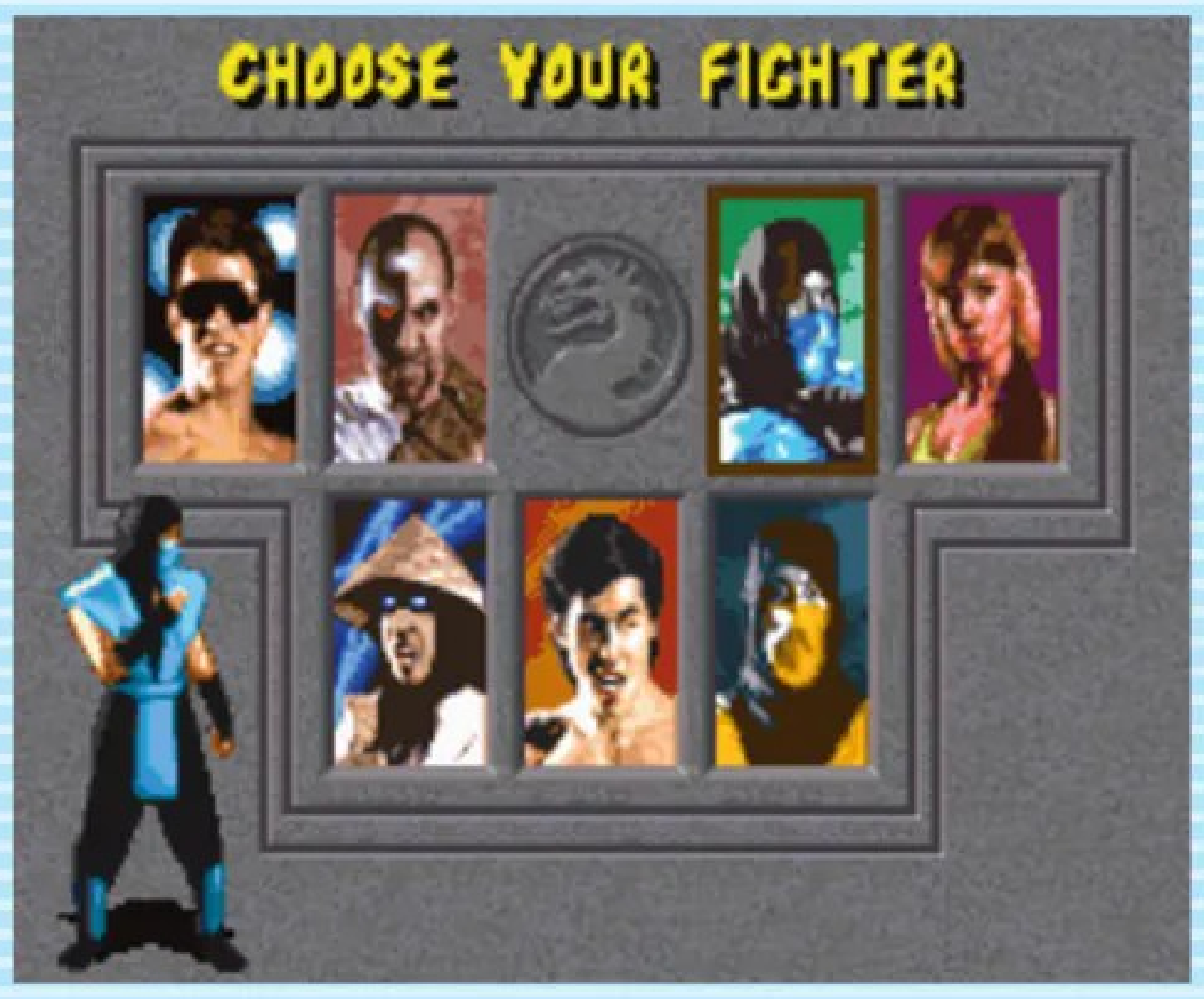
The Lin Kuei, or 'forest demons', were a Chinese cult, known for espionage and thievery, who resided in the expanses of China's wilderness. Feared by villagers, they moved, with the stealth of shadows, in and out of villages and homes, stealing food and goods. Today they are mainly known for developing ninjitsu – the 'ninja shadow warriors' predominant in China – in Japan. The two martial arts were very similar and are now often confused with each other. Both are present in perhaps the most essential rivalry in the canon – that of Sub-Zero and Scorpion.

Having been taken from the US to China by their father, the Sub-Zero brothers are introduced to Lin Kuei. It is the older brother who begins the story, when he is hired by Quan Chi to recover an ancient amulet in *Mortal Kombat Mythologies*. Little did Sub-Zero know that Quan Chi had also hired the Japanese ninja Hanzo Hasashi, for the same task. Sub-Zero murders Hanzo, turning the fallen ninja into a spectre named Scorpion. He then recovers the amulet, only to learn that it is the key to the release of the fallen Elder God Shinnok. No sooner has he given the amulet to Quan Chi he steals it back, at the request of Raiden, impressing the thunder god into entering him into the Mortal Kombat tournament. During the tournament, Sub-Zero faced Scorpion once more and lost his life at the ninja's hands, sending his soul to the Netherrealm, where he becomes Noob Saibot and joins the Brotherhood of Shadow and Shao Kahn's invasion of Earthrealm. And that's just a small taster!

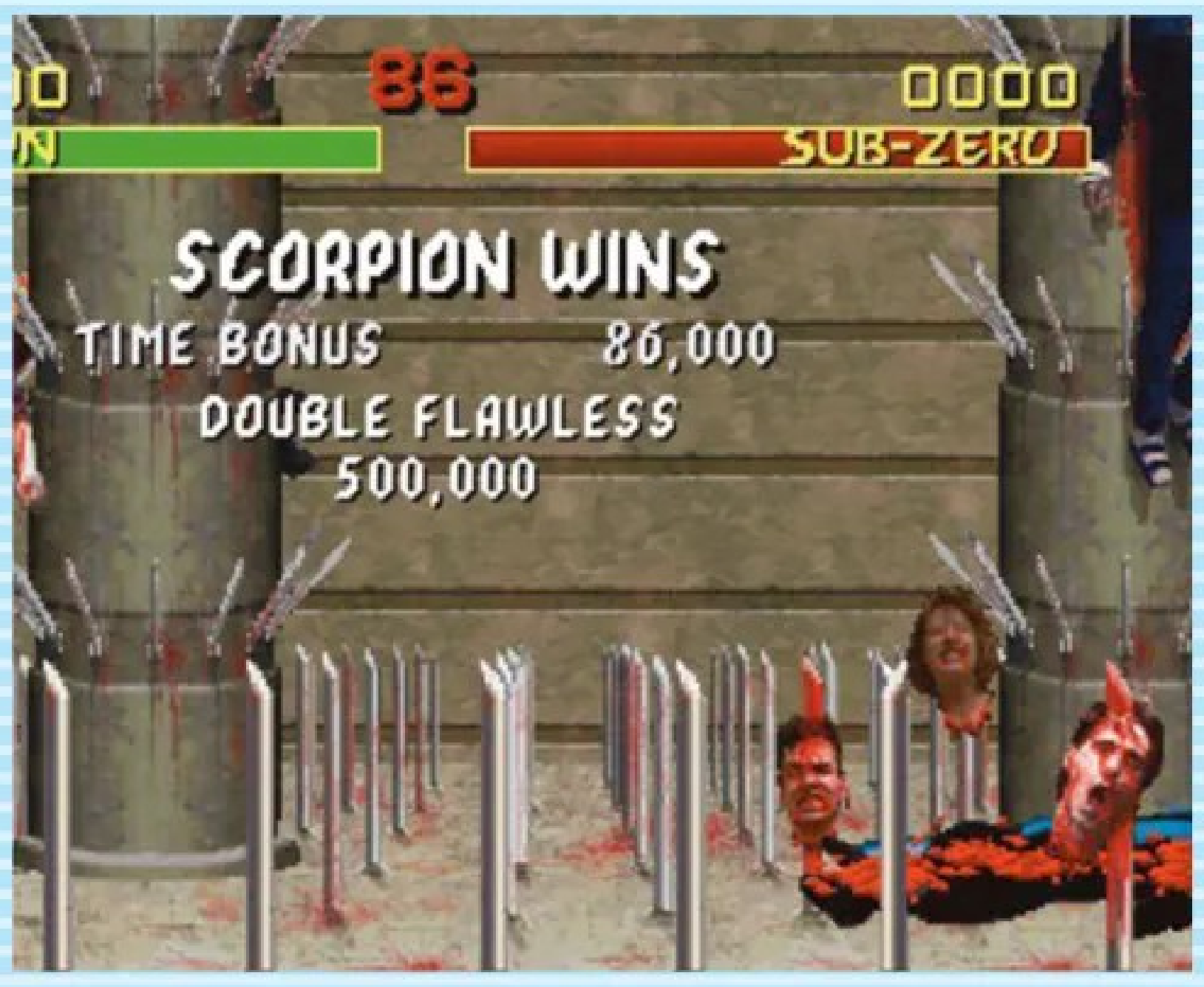
While the plot behind *Mortal Kombat* might have eluded players, the graphics certainly did not. Where all previous beat-'em-ups had been comparatively family-friendly, with cartoon graphics, *Mortal Kombat* was about real fighting, with real actors, ending in real results: Fatalities. The genius of digitised graphics lies beneath the scenes. Though on the face of it, the characters in *Mortal Kombat* were still cartoons and not real, the visage and motions of those characters were genuine. It is in our nature to subconsciously interpret physical motion to a degree we cannot quantify. As such, no matter how accurate an artist's impression may be, it will never trick us into believing that it is actually real – as such there is a barrier between the player and the violence of a game. *Mortal Kombat* surpassed this and introduced us to a heightened sense of realism – albeit a very jerkily animated one.

Those who thought that RPGs had extensive stories may be surprised to learn that one of the most direct, immediate, and violent games ever made has a story to match. Not only has *Mortal Kombat*'s story taken shape through an expansive, constantly evolving gaming world – the eleventh game, *Mortal Kombat 11*, released earlier this year to great reviews – but it has also entailed two motion-picture releases (*Mortal Kombat*, and *Mortal Kombat Annihilation*) with a third film planned for 2021, as well as an animated prequel to the first movie (*Mortal Kombat: The Journey Begins*) and two TV series (*Defenders Of The Realm* and *Conquest*). Then there was the *Mortal Kombat: Live Tour*, a theatrical show where *Mortal Kombat* characters performed martial arts on stage; two comic books; a techno album; and more memorabilia than you could fit into an aircraft carrier. Clearly there's more to life than just kicking the holy heck out of someone. *

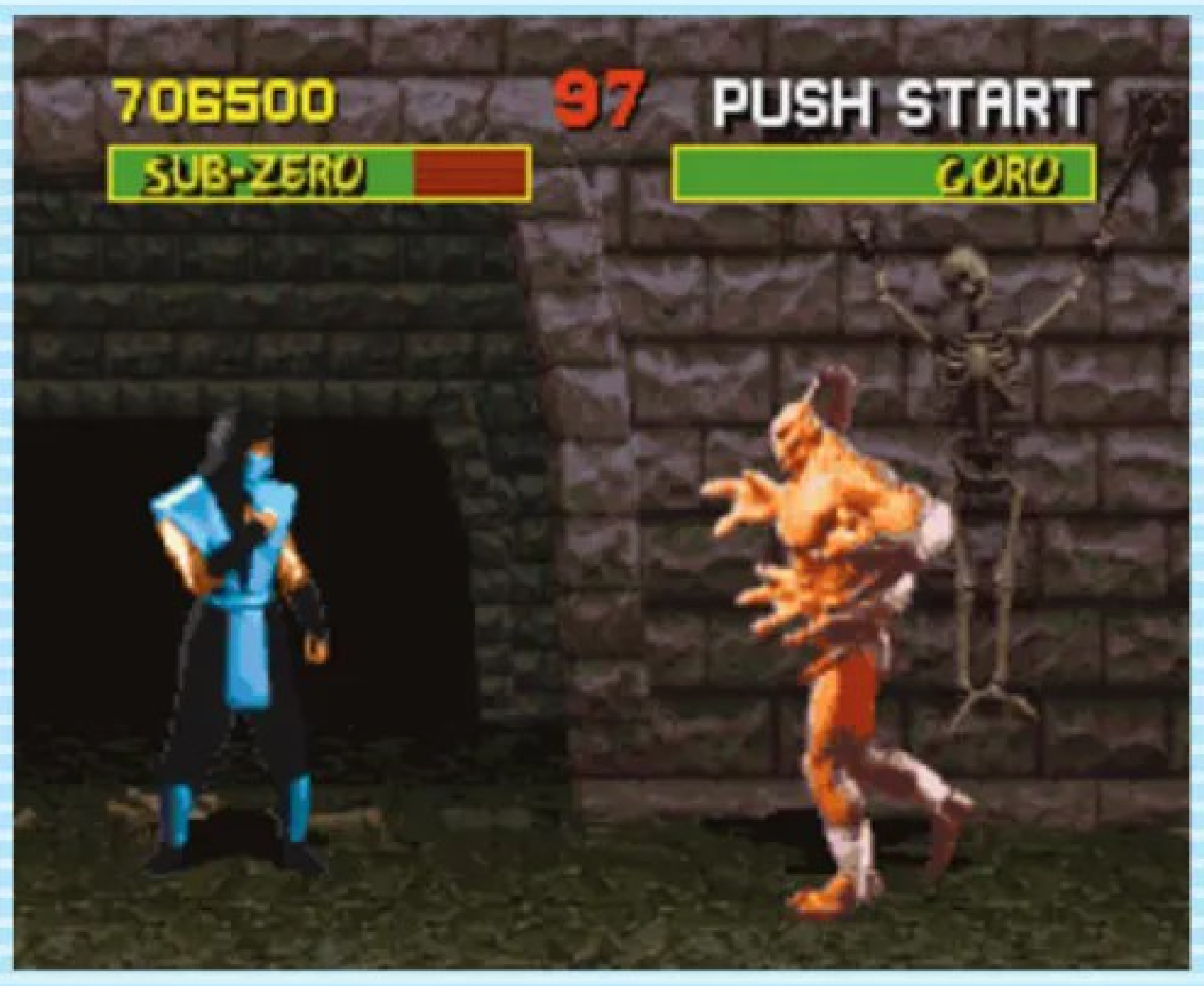
> MAGIC MOMENTS



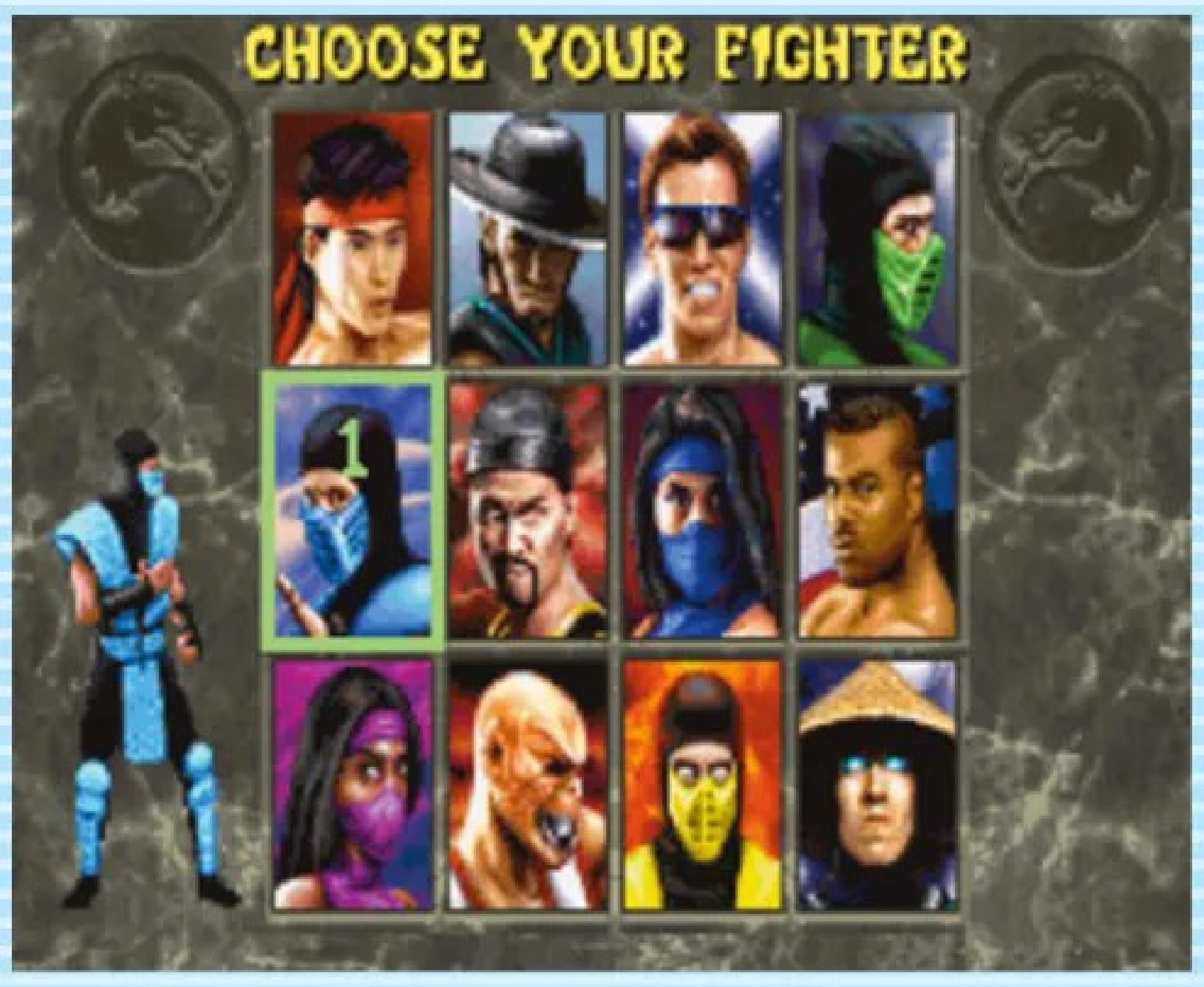
Enter the mo-cap cast of what became one of the most popular arcade games.



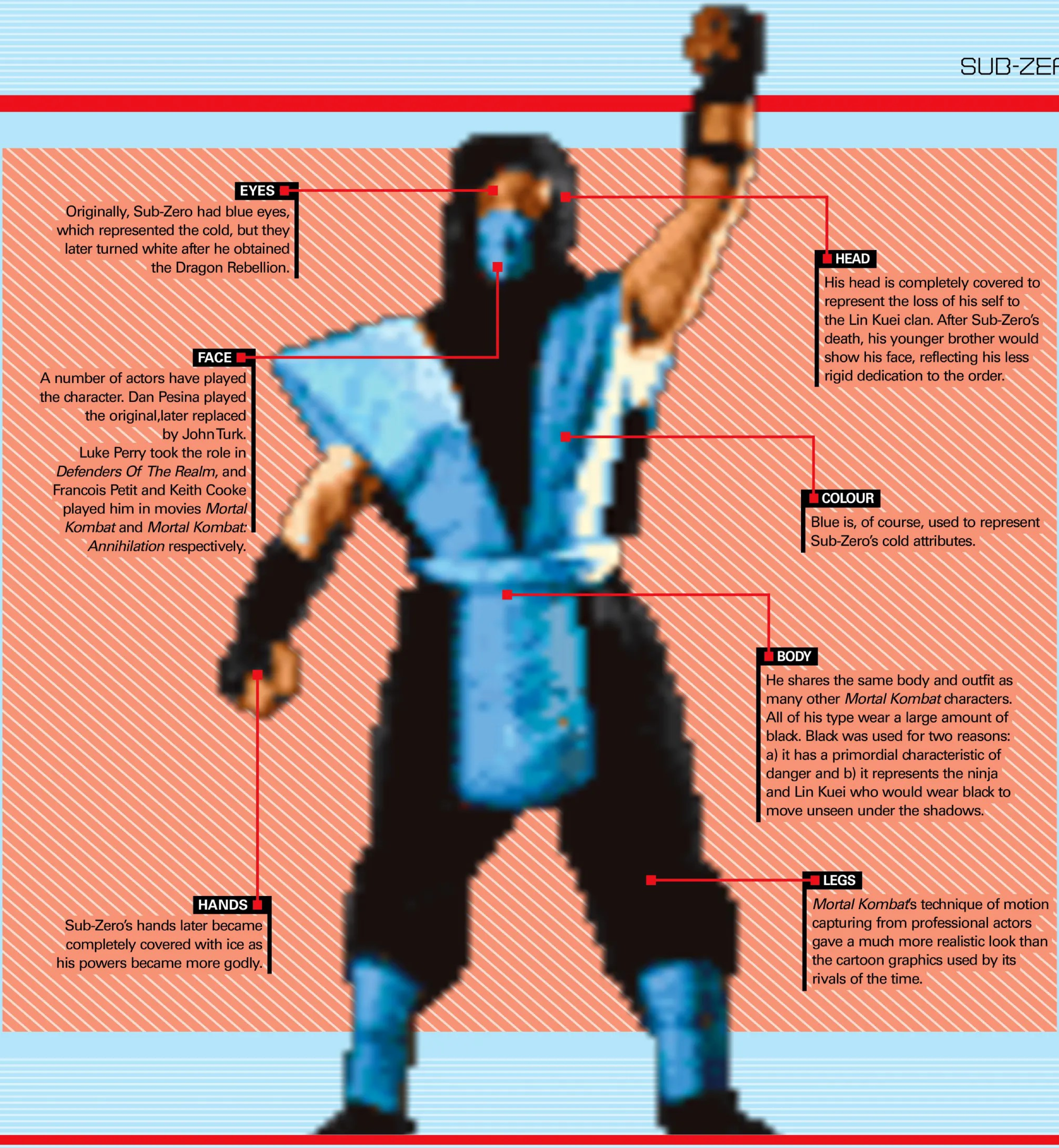
Who can forget the pleasure of knocking your defeated opponent into a pit of spikes?



The prince of the Shokan race took some beating until you learned how to cheese him.



MK II gave us more characters, Fatalities, pits, new friendships, and Babalities.



EYES
Originally, Sub-Zero had blue eyes, which represented the cold, but they later turned white after he obtained the Dragon Rebellion.

FACE
A number of actors have played the character. Dan Pesina played the original,later replaced by John Turk. Luke Perry took the role in *Defenders Of The Realm*, and Francois Petit and Keith Cooke played him in movies *Mortal Kombat* and *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* respectively.

HANDS
Sub-Zero's hands later became completely covered with ice as his powers became more godly.

HEAD
His head is completely covered to represent the loss of his self to the Lin Kuei clan. After Sub-Zero's death, his younger brother would show his face, reflecting his less rigid dedication to the order.

COLOUR
Blue is, of course, used to represent Sub-Zero's cold attributes.

BODY
He shares the same body and outfit as many other *Mortal Kombat* characters. All of his type wear a large amount of black. Black was used for two reasons: a) it has a primordial characteristic of danger and b) it represents the ninja and Lin Kuei who would wear black to move unseen under the shadows.

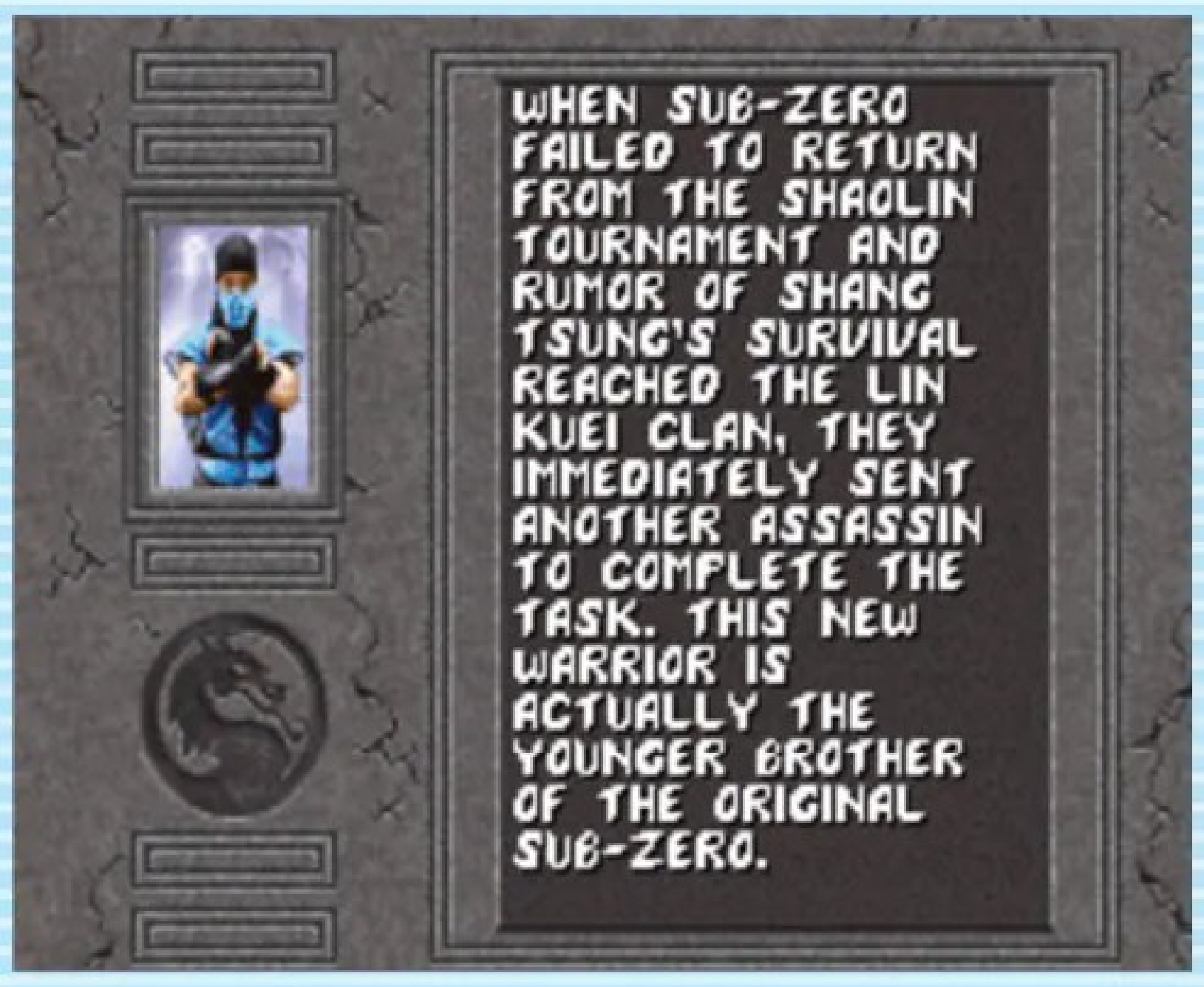
LEGS
Mortal Kombat's technique of motion capturing from professional actors gave a much more realistic look than the cartoon graphics used by its rivals of the time.

07 WINS
78
SUB-ZERO
KINTARO

An enraged Kintaro, one of the toughest bosses in the series, goes all stompy stompy.

08 WINS
99
PRESS START
SUB-ZERO
SHAO KAHN
ROUND 1

"You weak pathetic fool… You will die mortal!" booms Shao Kahn.



WHEN SUB-ZERO FAILED TO RETURN FROM THE SHAOLIN TOURNAMENT AND RUMOR OF SHANG TSUNG'S SURVIVAL REACHED THE LIN KUEI CLAN, THEY IMMEDIATELY SENT ANOTHER ASSASSIN TO COMPLETE THE TASK. THIS NEW WARRIOR IS ACTUALLY THE YOUNGER BROTHER OF THE ORIGINAL SUB-ZERO.

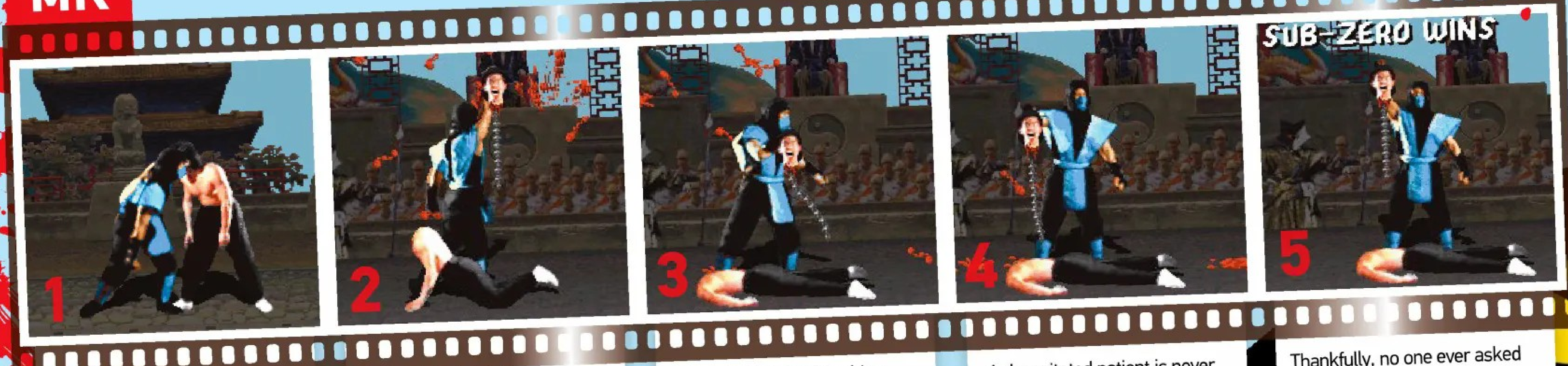
Finally, we get to learn some information about each character.

WINS: 01
94
PRESS START
SHEEVA
SONYA

Mortal Kombat 3 gave us the most stupid but fun finishers ever: the Animality.

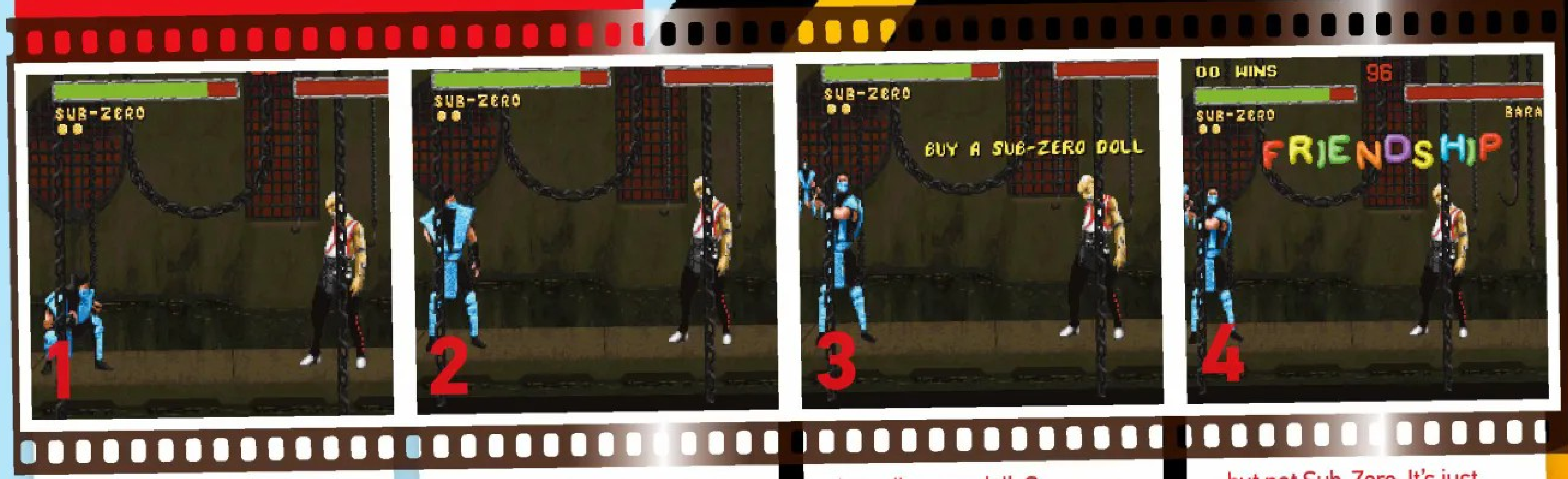
FATALITIES

MK



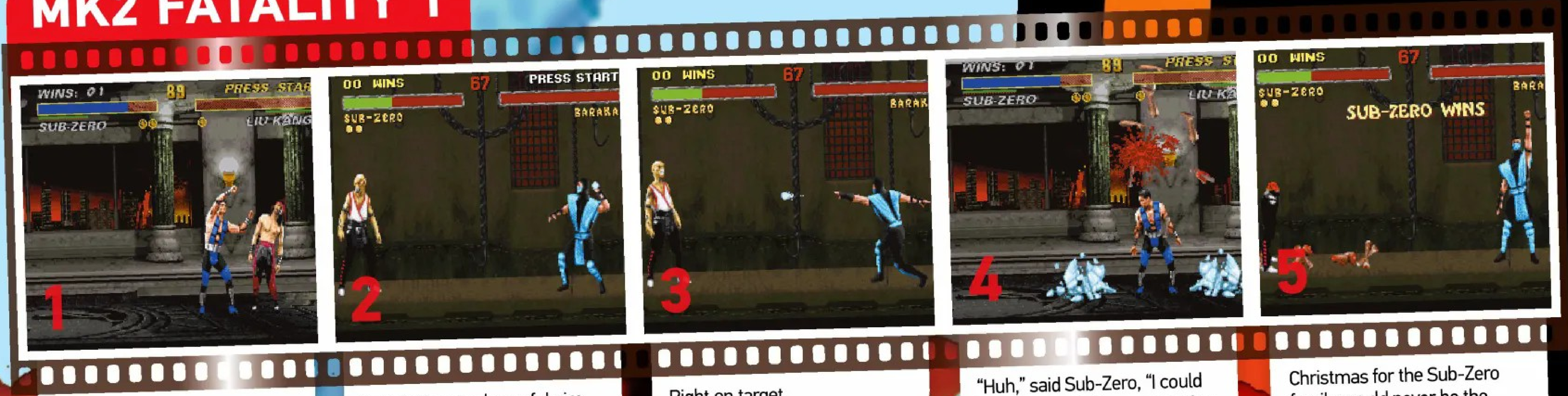
1. Life as a chiropractor was always difficult for Sub-Zero. First he'd take a good look…
2. …then lengthen out the spine. A standard move, but it still goes horribly wrong.
3. Not only that, but his shiny new uniform also gets covered in blood.
4. A decapitated patient is never satisfied.
5. Thankfully, no one ever asked for a refund.

MK2 FRIENDSHIP



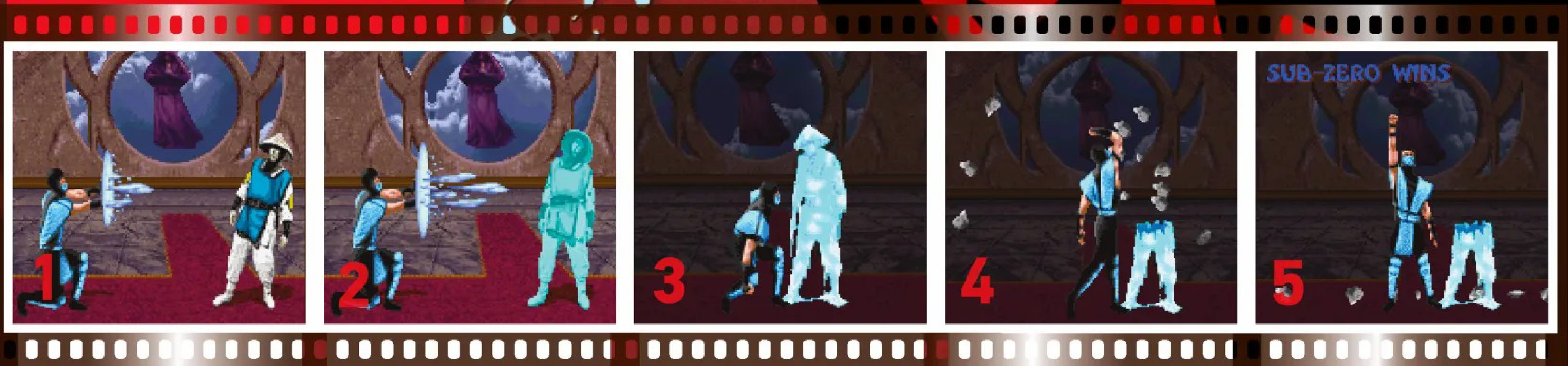
1. Sub-Zero didn't like the way that demented old grandad was looking at him.
2. Hoping to take advantage of the old man's favour by way of his pension…
3. …he pulls out a doll. Some say an apology gift should be free, especially after beating the heck out of an old man…
4. …but not Sub-Zero. It's just another shameless self-promotion.

MK2 FATALITY 1



1. Baraka was laughing at Sub-Zero's ineptness in snowball fights.
2. So Sub-Zero took careful aim and gave it his best shot.
3. Right on target.
4. "Huh," said Sub-Zero, "I could have sworn that was a regular snowball and not a grenade."
5. Christmas for the Sub-Zero family would never be the same again.

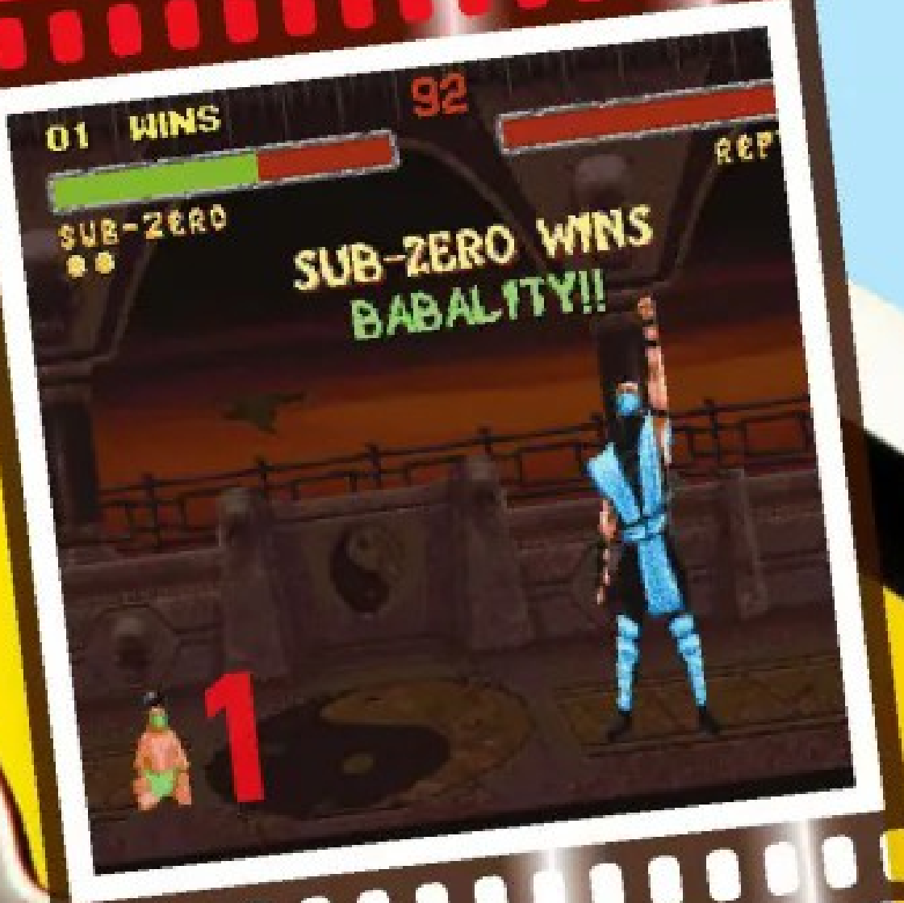
MK2 FATALITY 2



1. Raiden was rather wobbly in the knees after a night on the town…
2. So Sub-Zero decided to freeze him in place.
3. Noticing that he has now created a rather tasty lollipop, he goes in for a closer look.
4. Some electricity managed to stick to Raiden, shocking Sub-Zero. Oops. That's one unhealthy God of Thunder.
5. Afraid of being caught under the influence next to an exploded god, Sub-Zero hails a taxi for a quick getaway.

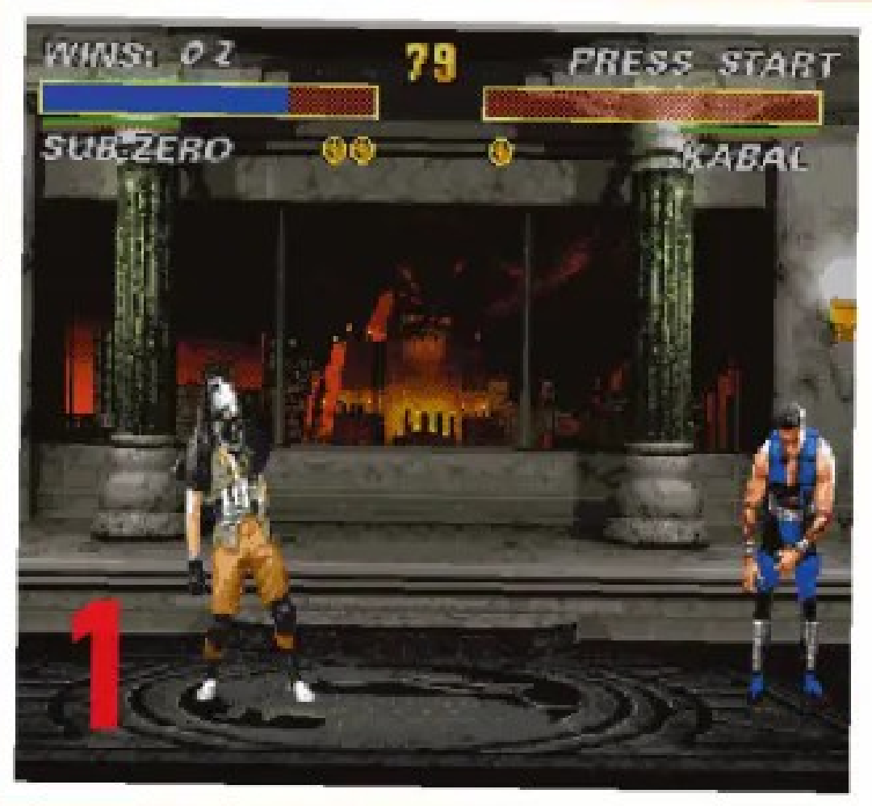
One of the defining aspects of the *Mortal Kombat* series has always been its brutal Fatalities. Seen as a way to seperate *Mortal Kombat* from *Street Fighter* and other one-on-one brawlers, they've become more and more outlandish as the games have gone on, with some of the newer games being incredibly graphic. As the following examples show, there are plenty of over-the-top Fatalities in the first three games and even some comedic ones. The lengthy commands for each different move mean it's hard to remember them all, so we've shown all of Sub-Zero's moves here to save you the bother of performing them yourself.

MK2 BABALITY

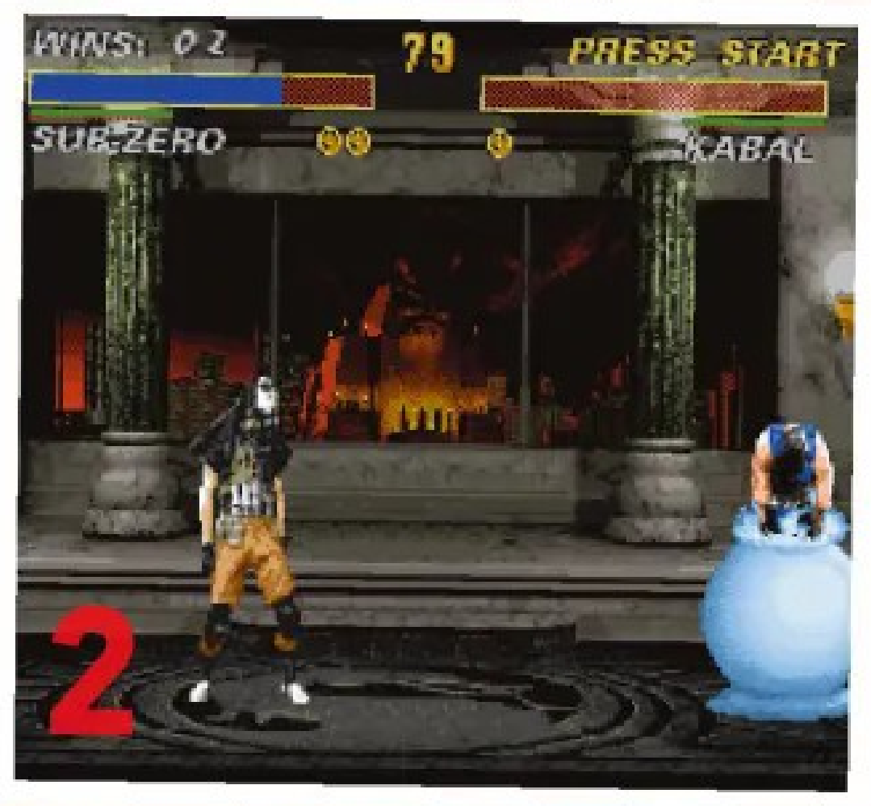

01 WINS
92
SUB-ZERO
REP
SUB-ZERO WINS
BABALITY!!
1

Without so much as moving an arm, Sub-Zero turns Reptile into a baby. No wonder he's proud.

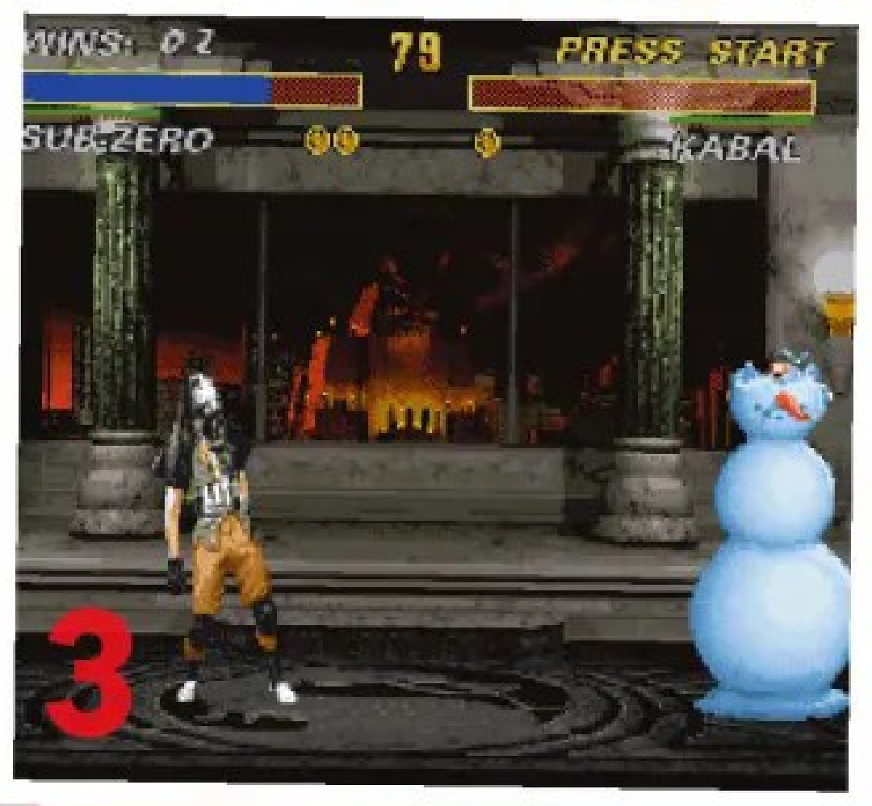
MK3 FRIENDSHIP


WINS: 02
79
PRESS START
SUB-ZERO
KABAL
1

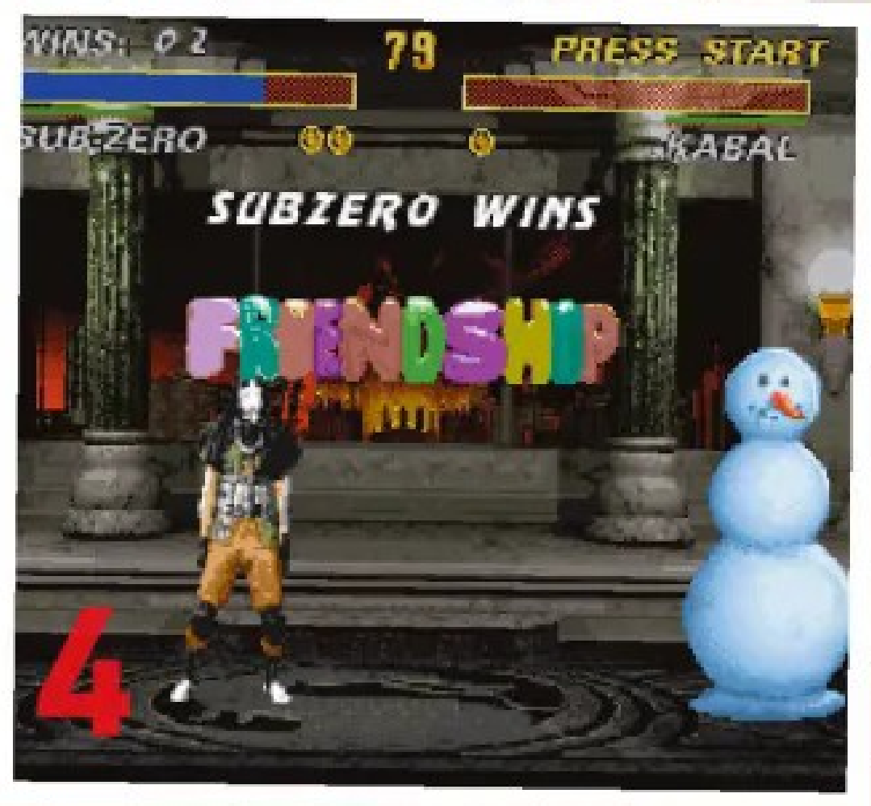
Kabal was wondering why Sub-Zero was holding his cup...


WINS: 02
79
PRESS START
SUB-ZERO
KABAL
2

...when suddenly he started vomiting into a cauldron.

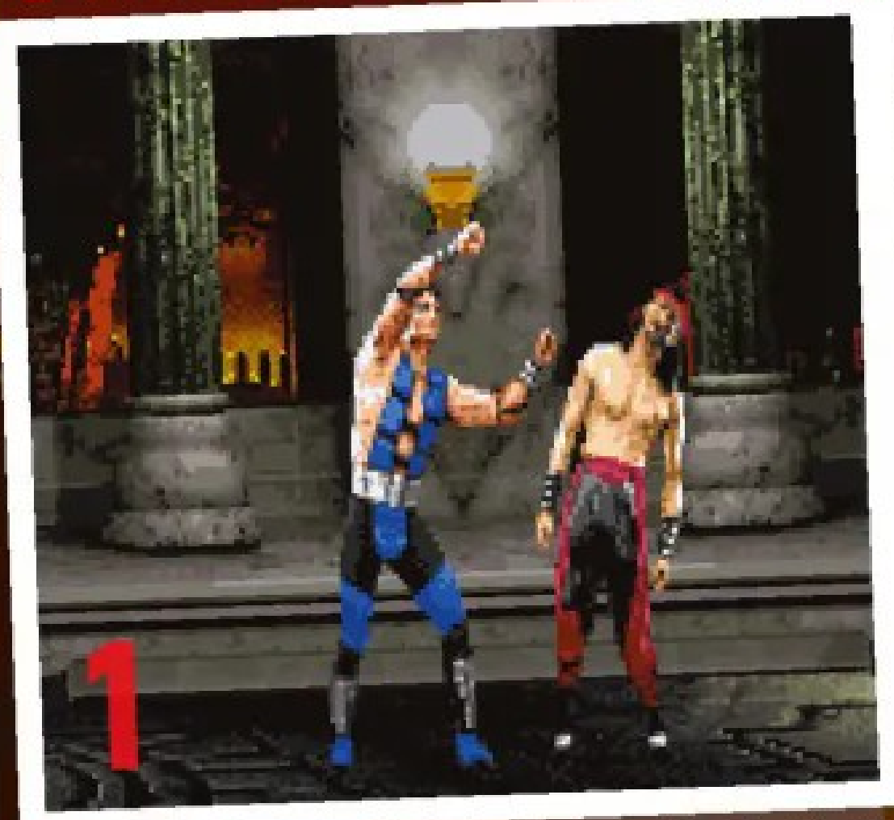

WINS: 02
79
PRESS START
SUB-ZERO
KABAL
3

The snowman was the final draw.

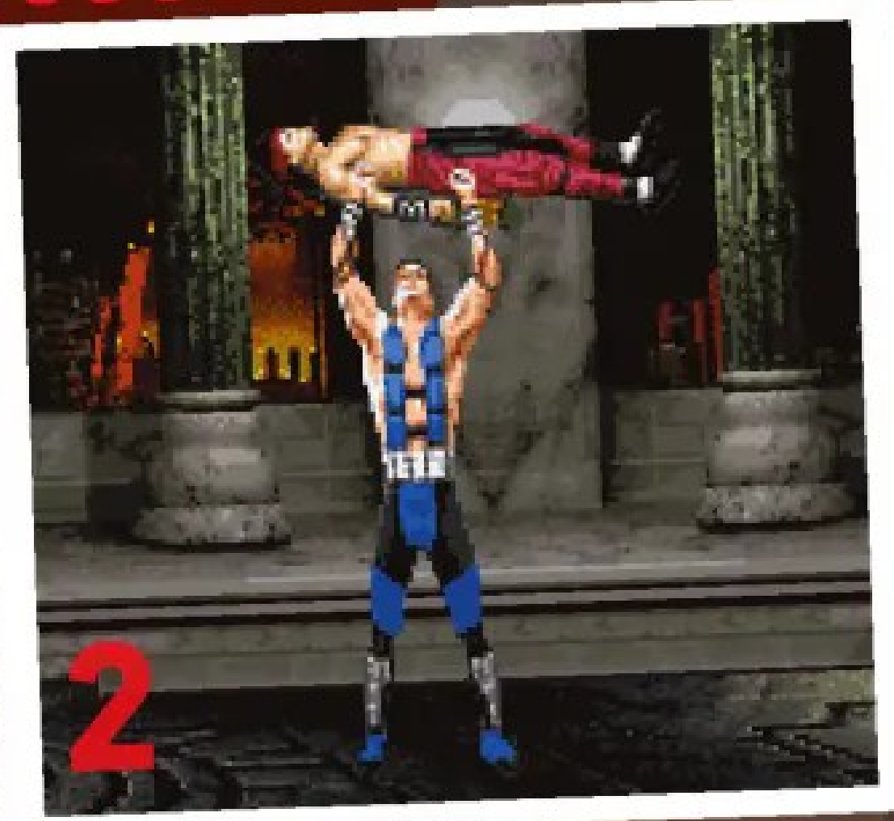

WINS: 02
79
PRESS START
SUB-ZERO
KABAL
SUBZERO WINS
FRIENDSHIP
4

Kabal vowed never to touch the JD again.

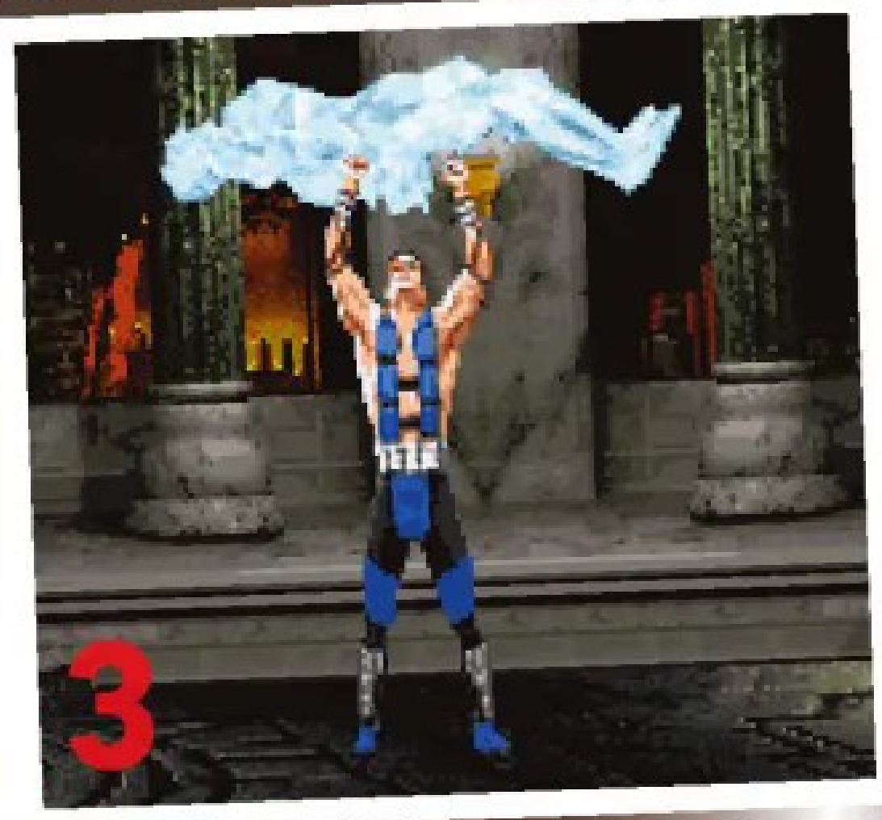
MK3 FATALITY A



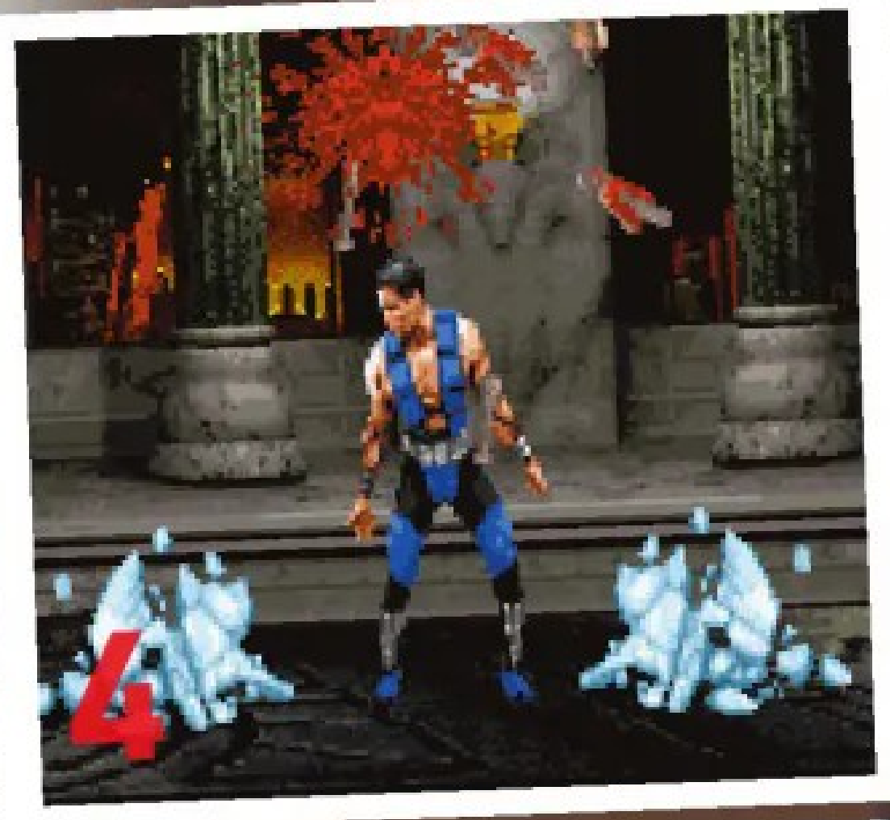
"See how big my muscles are. Why, I bet I could lift you over my head."



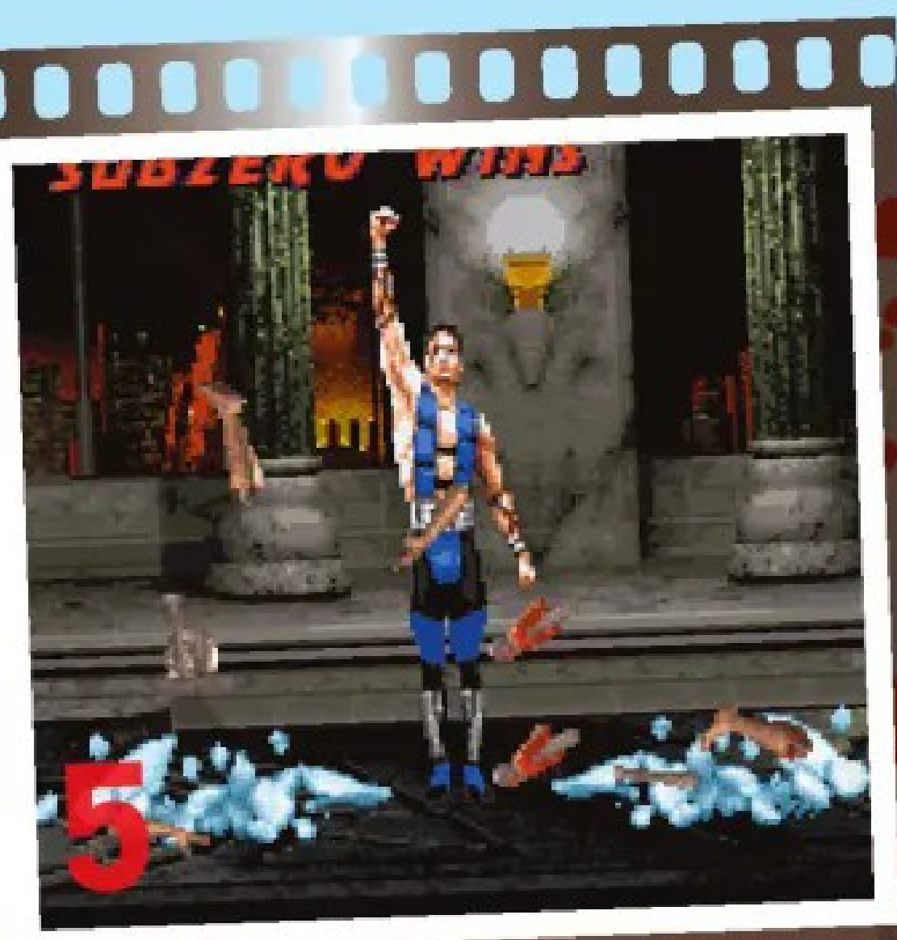
"Huh? It's a bit cold up here, mate," cried Liu.



"Wait," warned Sub-Zero. "I'm gonna... I'm gonna..."

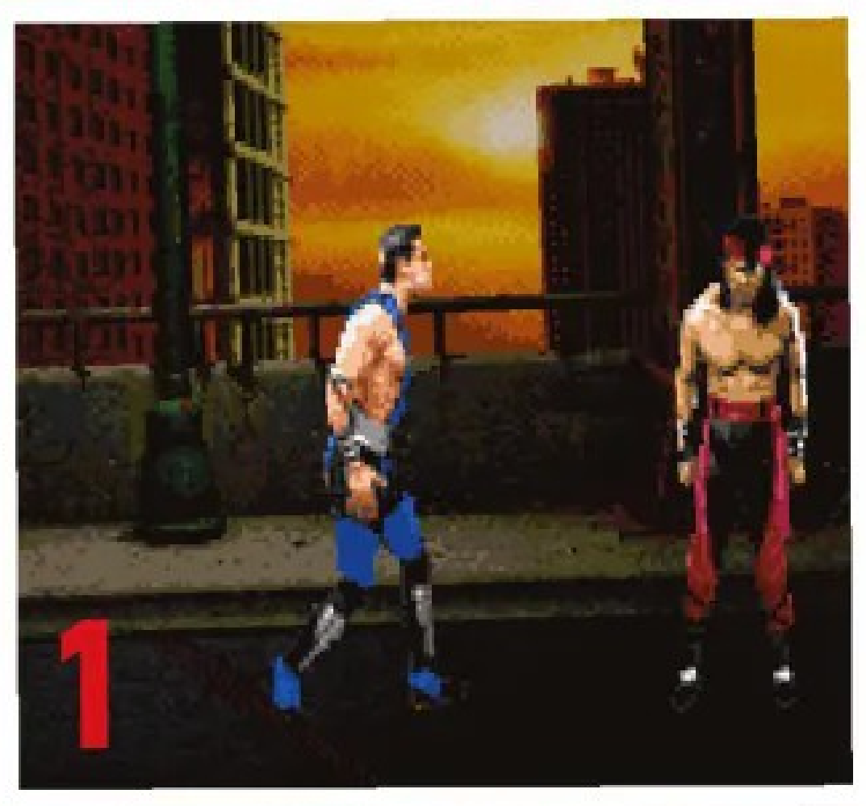


..."Waaaaaaaah- CHU!" sneezed Sub-Zero.

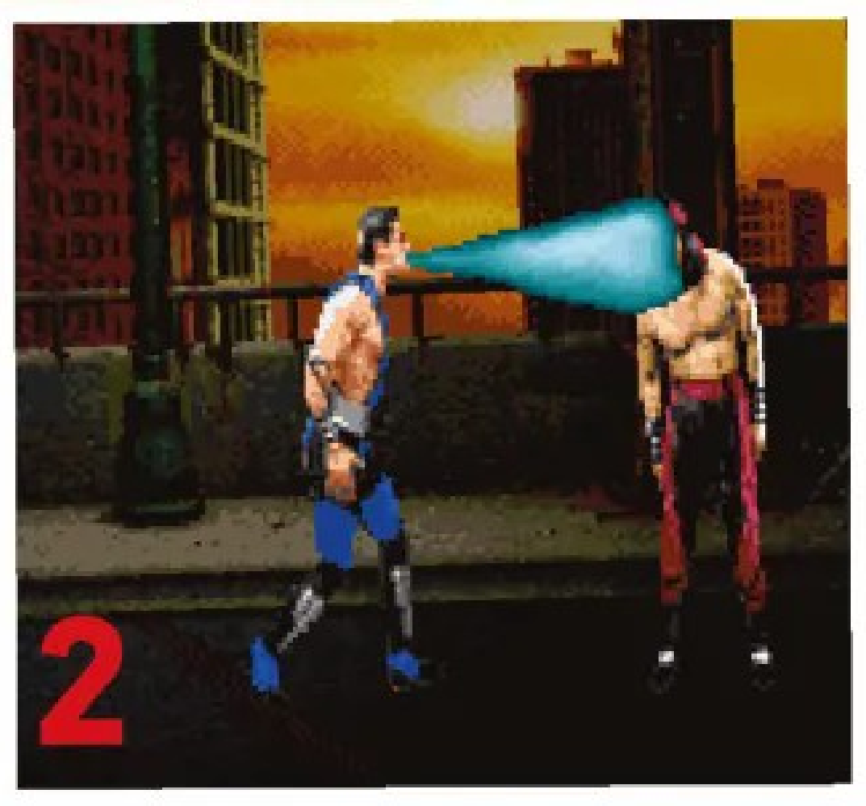

SUBZERO WINS
5

"Why? Why does this happen every time I get a new friend?"

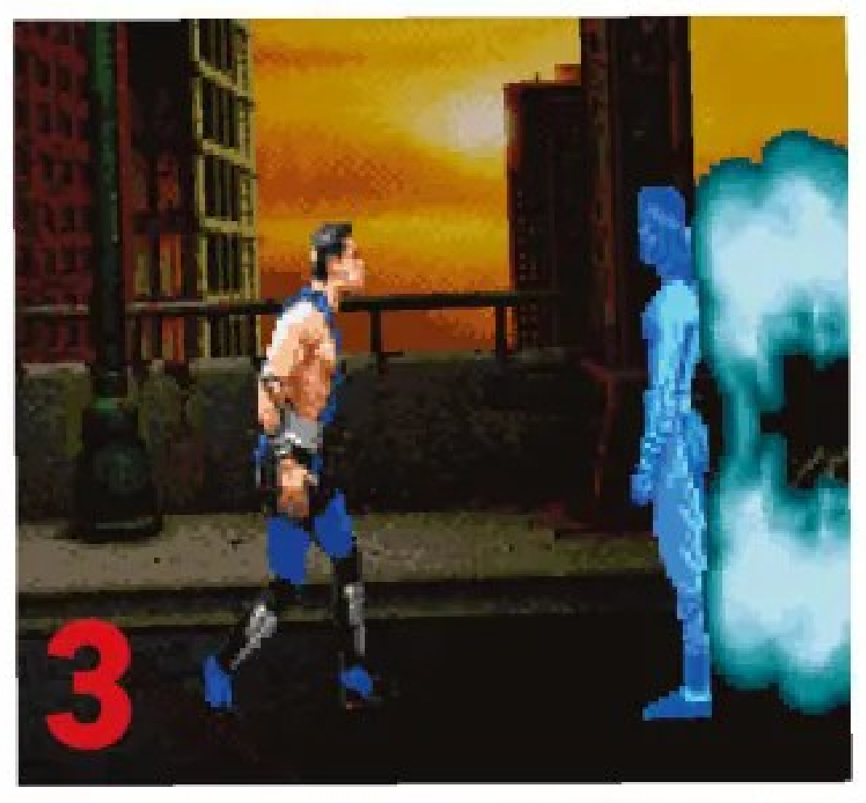
MK3 FATALITY B



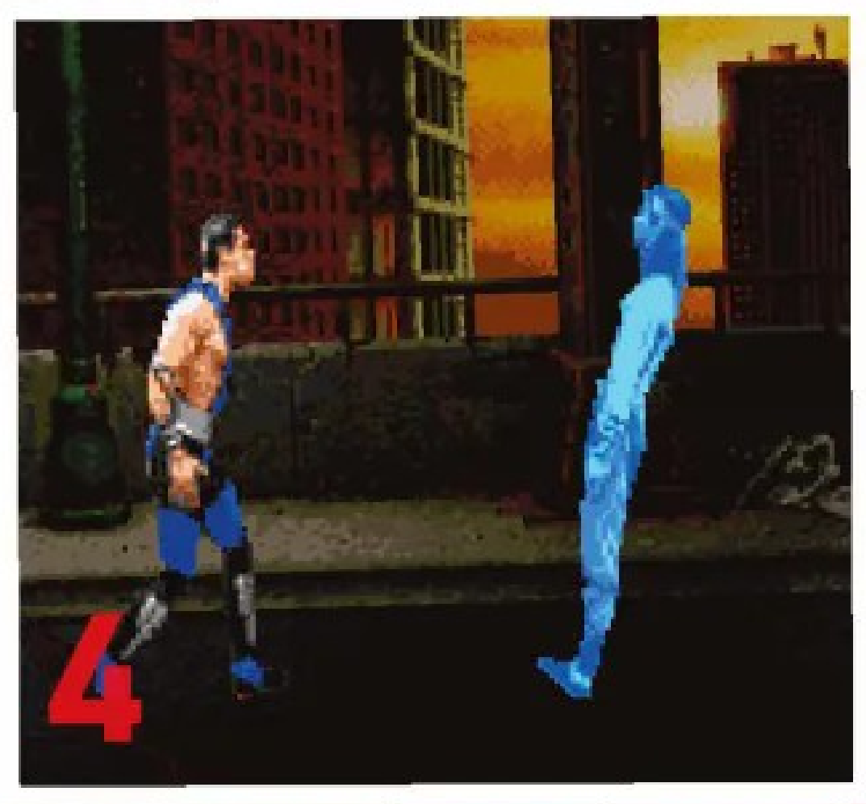
Liu Kang was a bit deaf in the left ear...



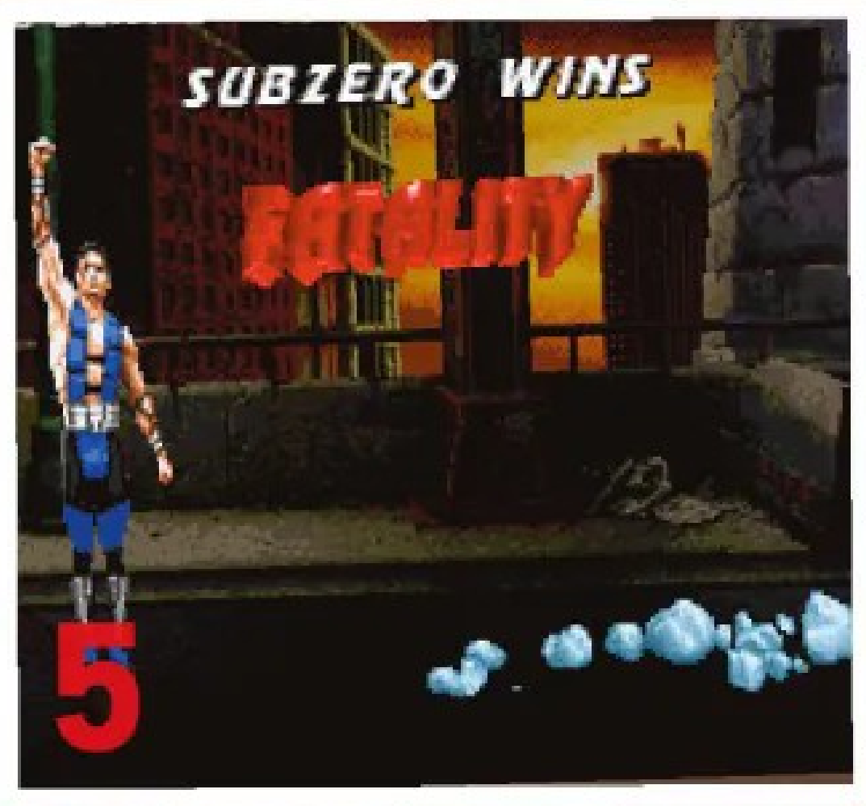
...so Sub-Zero had to yell...



...accidentally freezing Kang...

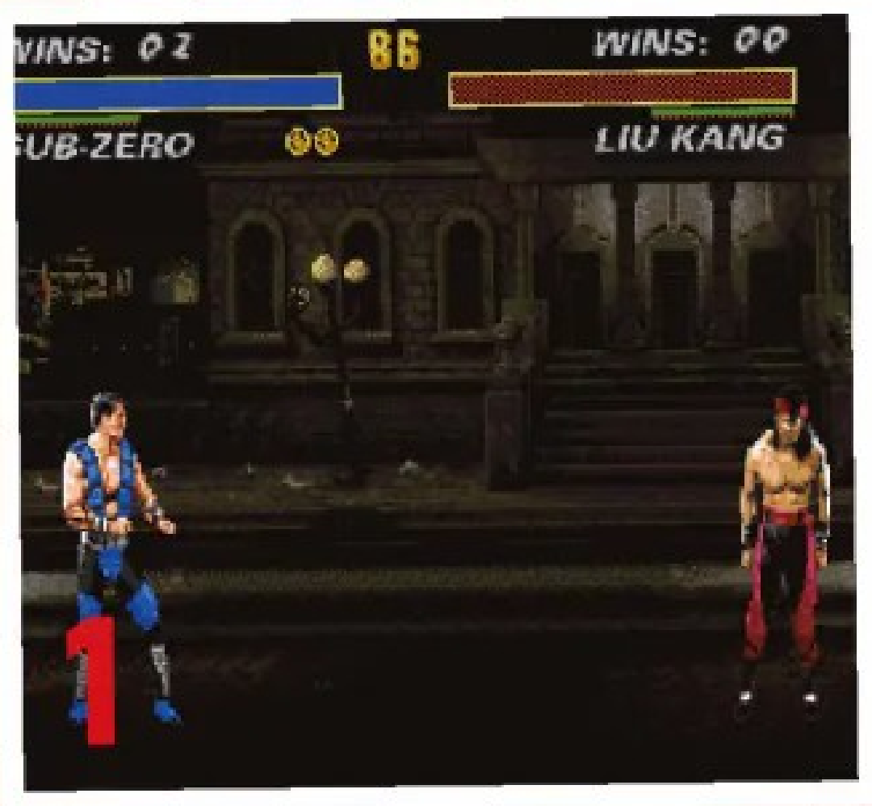


...who proceeded to fall over...

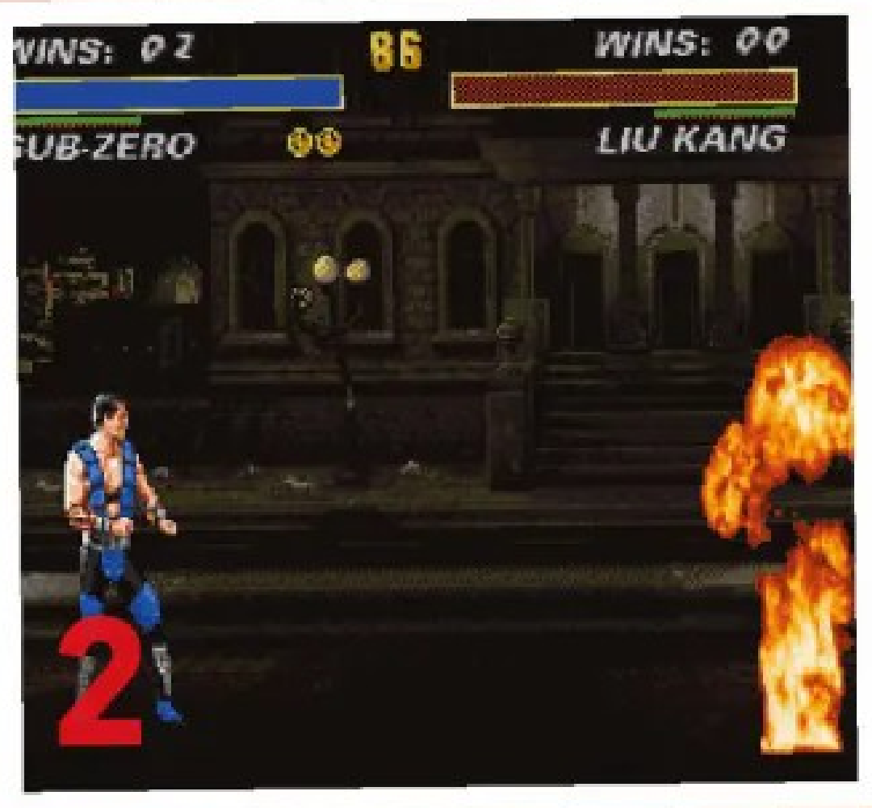

SUBZERO WINS
FATALITY
5

...in a right mess.

MK3 BABALITY


WINS: 02
86
WINS: 00
SUB-ZERO
LIU KANG
1

Sub-Zero was idly walking by when he saw Liu Kang looking a bit groggy.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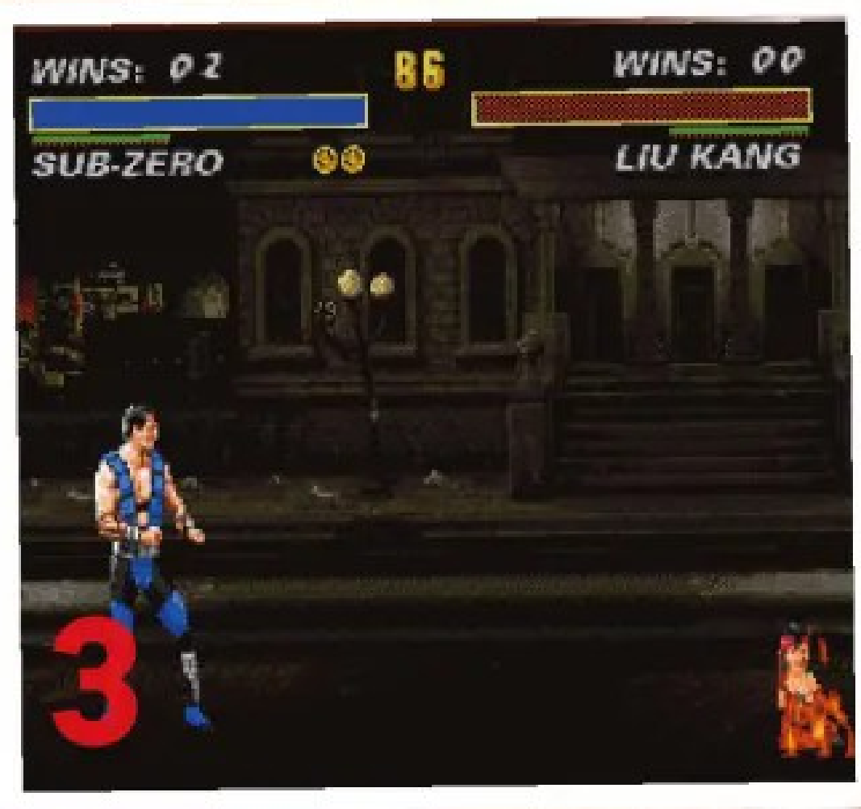
SUB-ZERO
LIU KANG
2

Although more than aware of his ability to douse a fire, Sub-Zero never did like Kang.


WINS: 02
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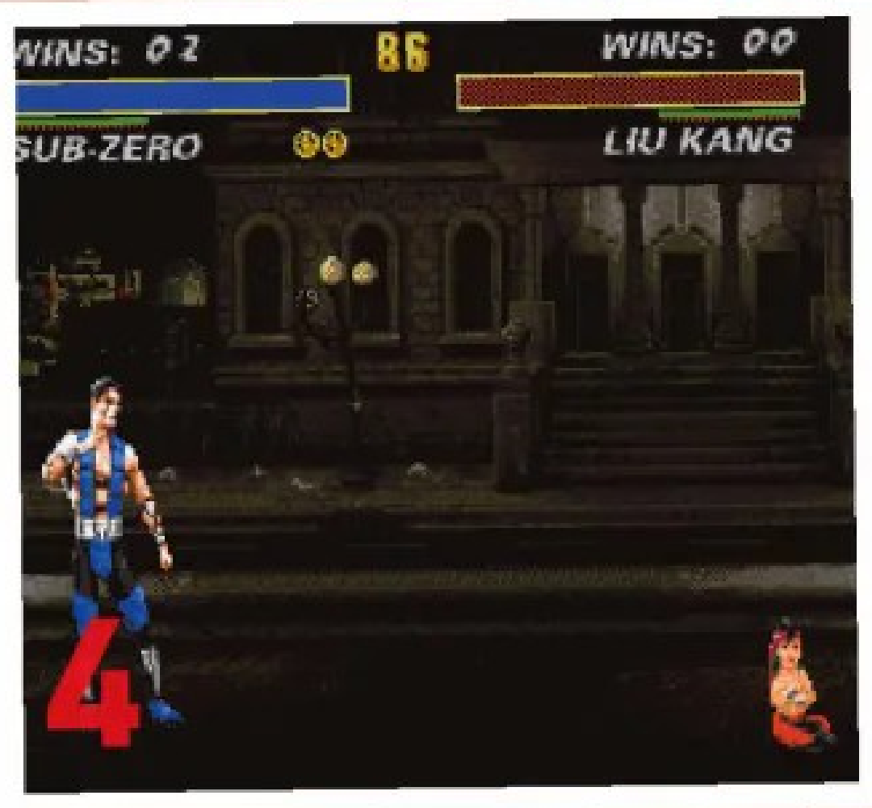
WINS: 00
SUB-ZERO
LIU KANG
3

As the flames die down, our hero's in for a big surprise...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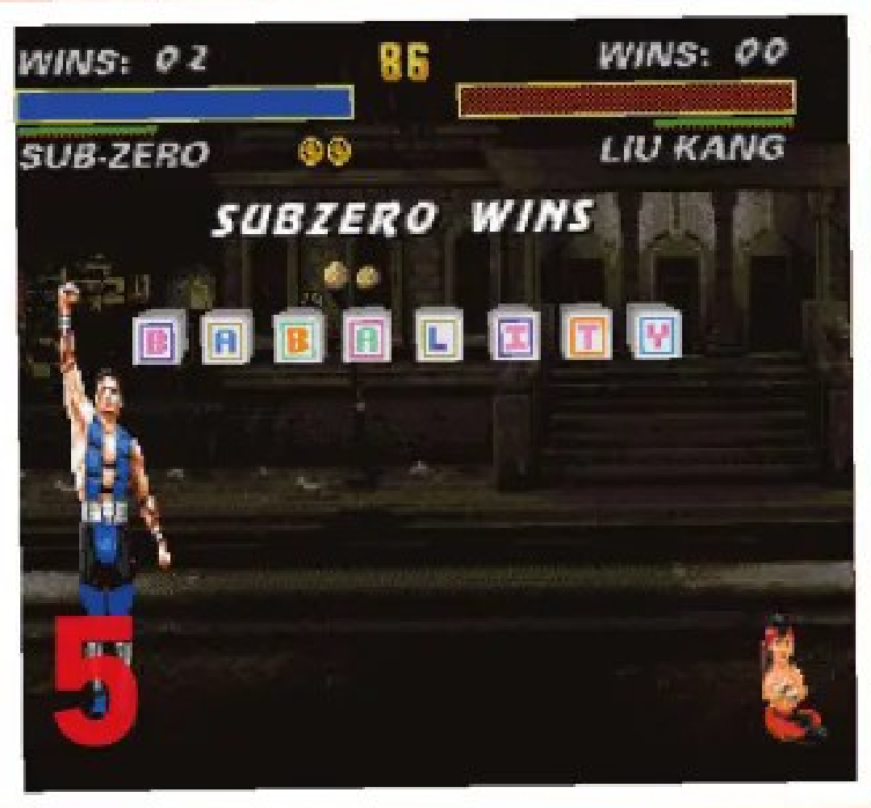
86
WINS: 00
SUB-ZERO
LIU KANG
4

...it's a baby Liu Kang. Ohhhh... isn't he cute.


WINS: 02
86
WINS: 00
SUB-ZERO
LIU KANG
SUBZERO WINS
BABALITY
5

That's what they call 'karma', father Sub-Zero.

TAILS

It's time to take a look at a foxy blue-eyed blonde with the power to sweep you off your feet. Calm down, everyone, it's only Tails…

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** MILES 'TAILS' PROWER
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** TEAM SONIC RACING
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** FLYING AFTER SONIC

According to an internet poll by Sega, Tails is the third most popular character in the *Sonic* series. The two-tailed fox, somehow fell behind Shadow the Hedgehog – a character whose solo PS2 and Xbox adventure can best be described as the virtual epithet of everything wrong with the *Sonic* franchise. Shadow has red highlights, drives a motorcycle and fires machine guns. Putting ordnance and Harleys in a Sonic game is like giving Q*Bert a Ferrari and teaching him to Dragon Punch.

If you know anyone who actually voted for Shadow in this bizarre poll, simply roll up this book and beat them with it until they stop breathing… then ring them an ambulance… but forget to give an address. You'll probably feel a sickening feeling – that's guilt, but in time that will go, and if it doesn't, just boot up *Sonic 2* and you'll begin to feel better about yourself. Okay, we are of course kidding, we don't recommend you do anything of the sort, but how Tails, Knuckles, and even Robotnik for that matter, came to get beaten by Shadow simply beggars belief.

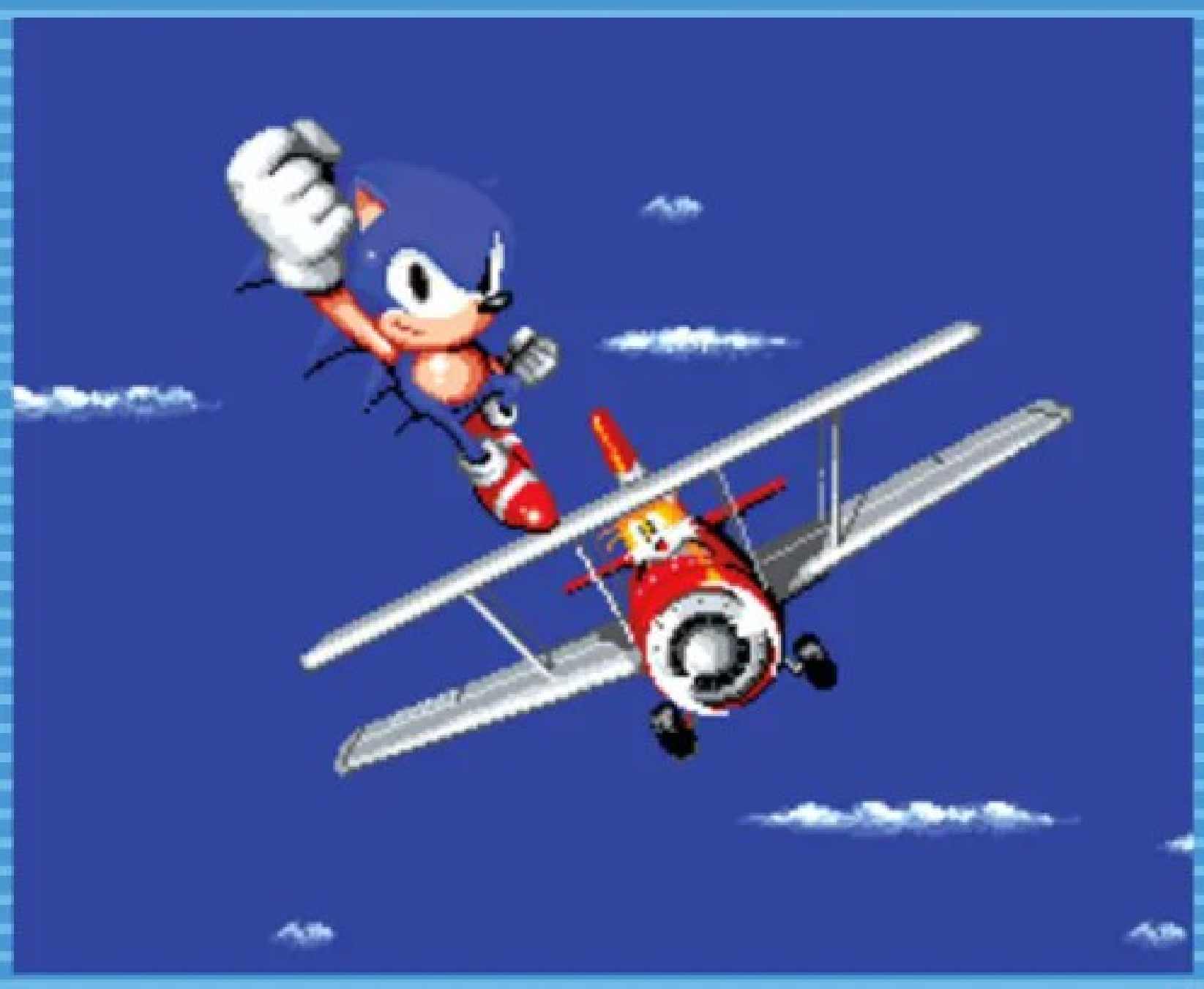
With an almost unseen level of anticipation, *Sonic 2*'s arrival didn't disappoint. Sega took everything that was great about the first game and bettered it. This time, like Mario, Sonic had a partner, a platonic relationship with a golden-haired fox who displayed Anakin Skywalker (circa Phantom Menace) qualities. Tails was heroic, practical, boyish, a keen mechanic and in awe of his blue pin-up – in hindsight, a clever foible if you consider that Tails' popularity and could stem from our sharing the same sense of adoration for his hero? Incidentally, in the comic series Tails learns that he is in fact a 'Chosen One' type character, a hero destined to be bring a great harmony to the world, which is probably the reason Robotnik wants to capture him.

Tails' first appearance was in *Sonic 2* on the Master System, which predated the Mega Drive version by an entire month. In the 8-bit game Tails was not actually a playable character. Instead, he is captured by Robotnik and used as a furry ransom to force Sonic the Hedgehog into locating the six Chaos Emeralds. Tails eventually got his moment to shine in the 16-bit Mega Drive version of *Sonic 2*, where he was introduced as Sonic's sidekick under the moniker Miles 'Tails' Prower. Miles was actually the original name for Tails, as was the wish by his creator, lead *Sonic the Hedgehog* designer Yasushi Yamaguchi, and Prower was added to make his full name sound phonetically like miles per hour. However, Miles was later curtailed in favour of Tails, owing to the fact that the character was designed with two of the things. This was incredibly bizarre. A character's full name is rarely referenced in videogames, and what made it doubly jarring was the fact that Sega hadn't made a big song and dance about revealing Sonic's full name, Sonic Boom Spinning Star-Kick Derek, at any point.

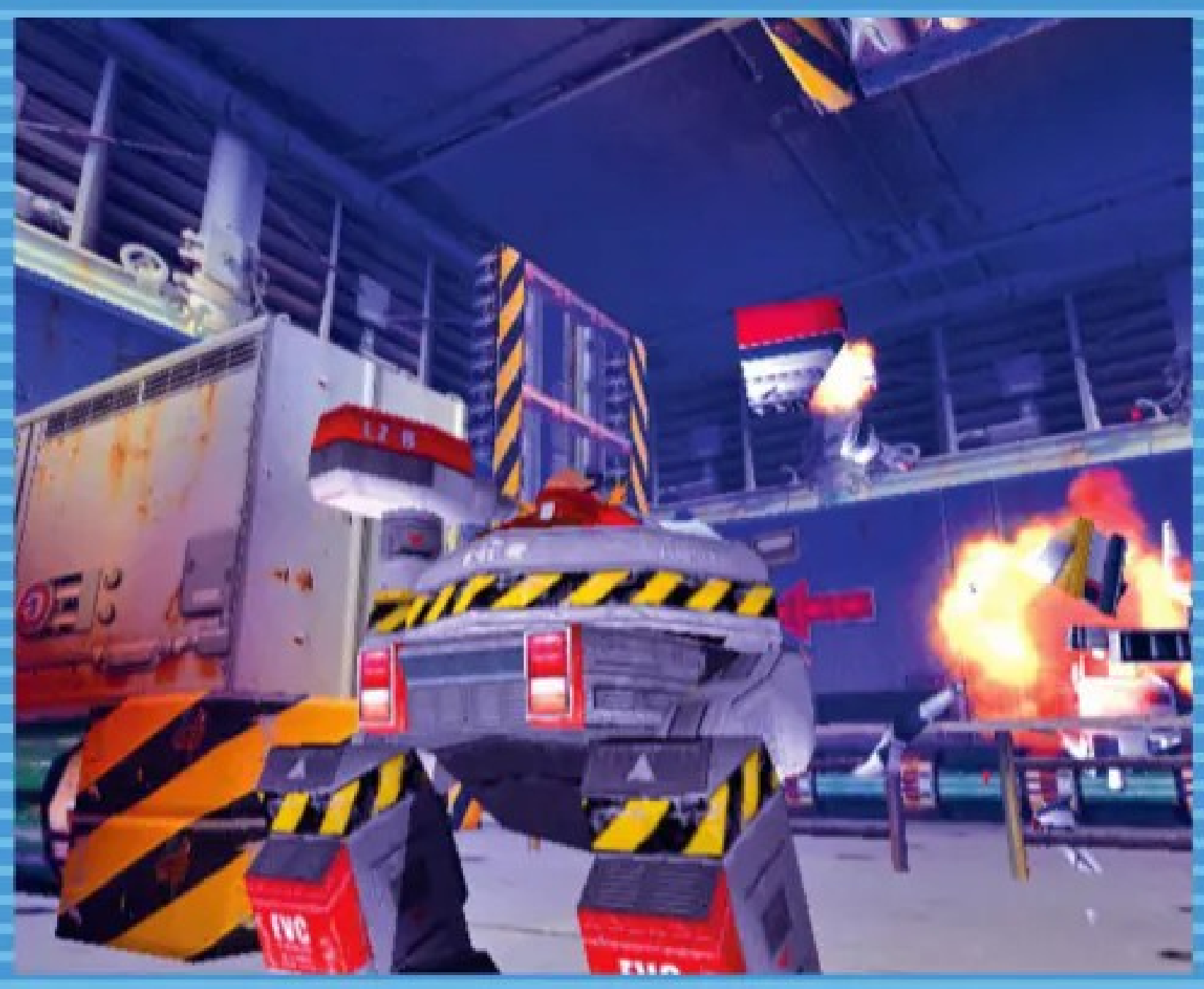
Tails' 16-bit debut inside a game so hyped and popular helped him almost eclipse the blue blur in popularity. The character's signature twin tails – which rotated like helicopter propellers – gave him the power of speed and flight (although it wasn't until the release of *Sonic Chaos* that players could control Tails in flight), and as a result, many fans actually opted to play through the game with the fox – until they quickly realised that collection of the six Chaos Emerald under the control of Sonic caused the spiky one to transform into the yellowed Super Sonic, and poor Tails just got lamely smothered in invincibility stars. This was later remedied in *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* when harnessing the power of the seven Super Emeralds turns Tails into Super Tails.

While Tails initially shot to fame in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* for his ability to fly, his skills in the sky have been somewhat toned down over the years. He seems to have gone from being the young apprentice to the annoying inventor, and seems to get younger with each game – a thinking that is further supported by the fact that his fur gets lighter, almost purer in colour, and his voice is becoming noticeably squeakier? If his development continues at this bizarre rate of age deceleration, in a few years' time don't be surprised to see Sonic the Hedgehog and a fox foetus battling Robotnik's grandson in an adventure plied with sub characters. You know the kind: different-coloured hedgehog variants and human characters that resemble those Dolmio sauce puppets. ✱

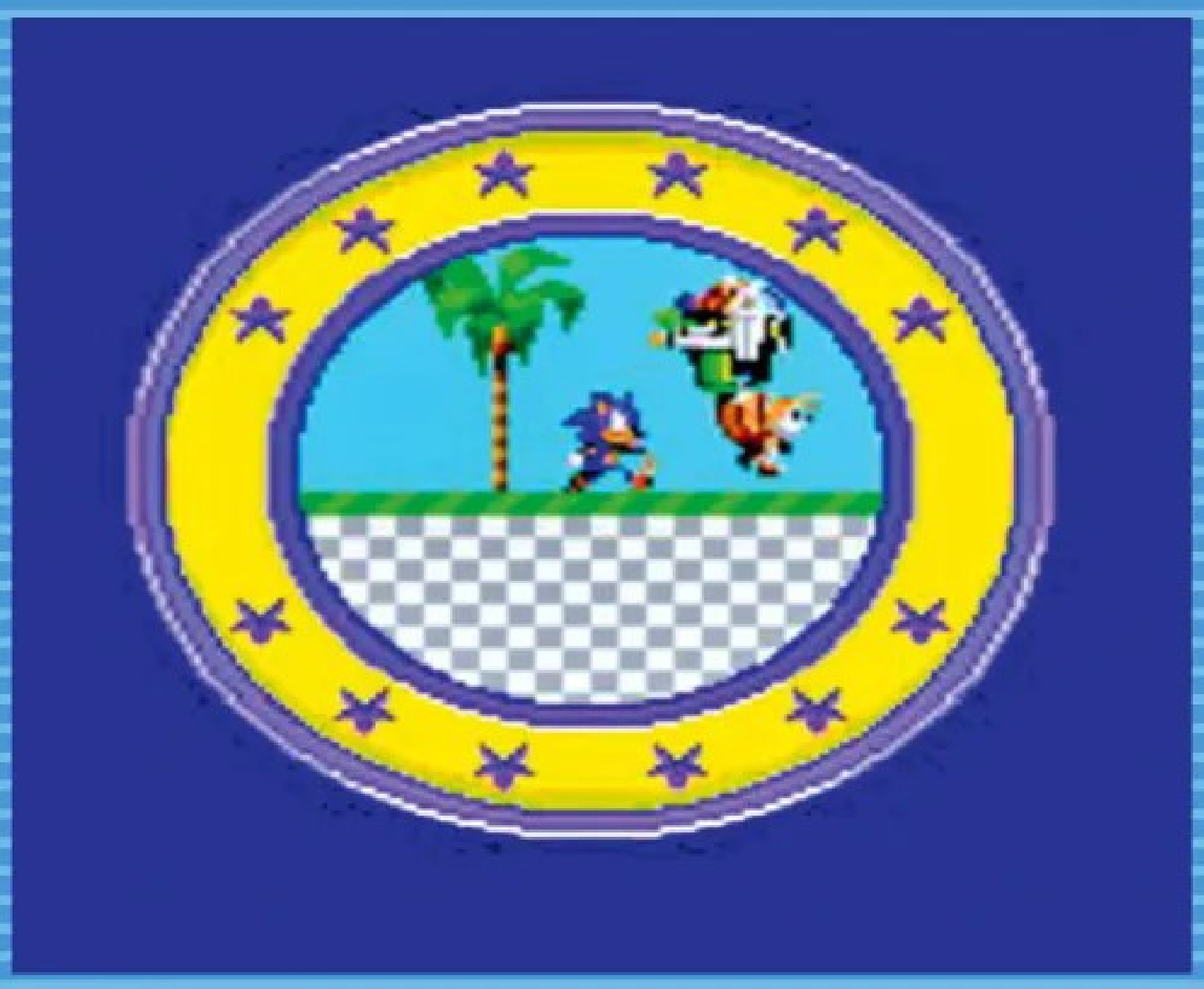
> MAGIC MOMENTS



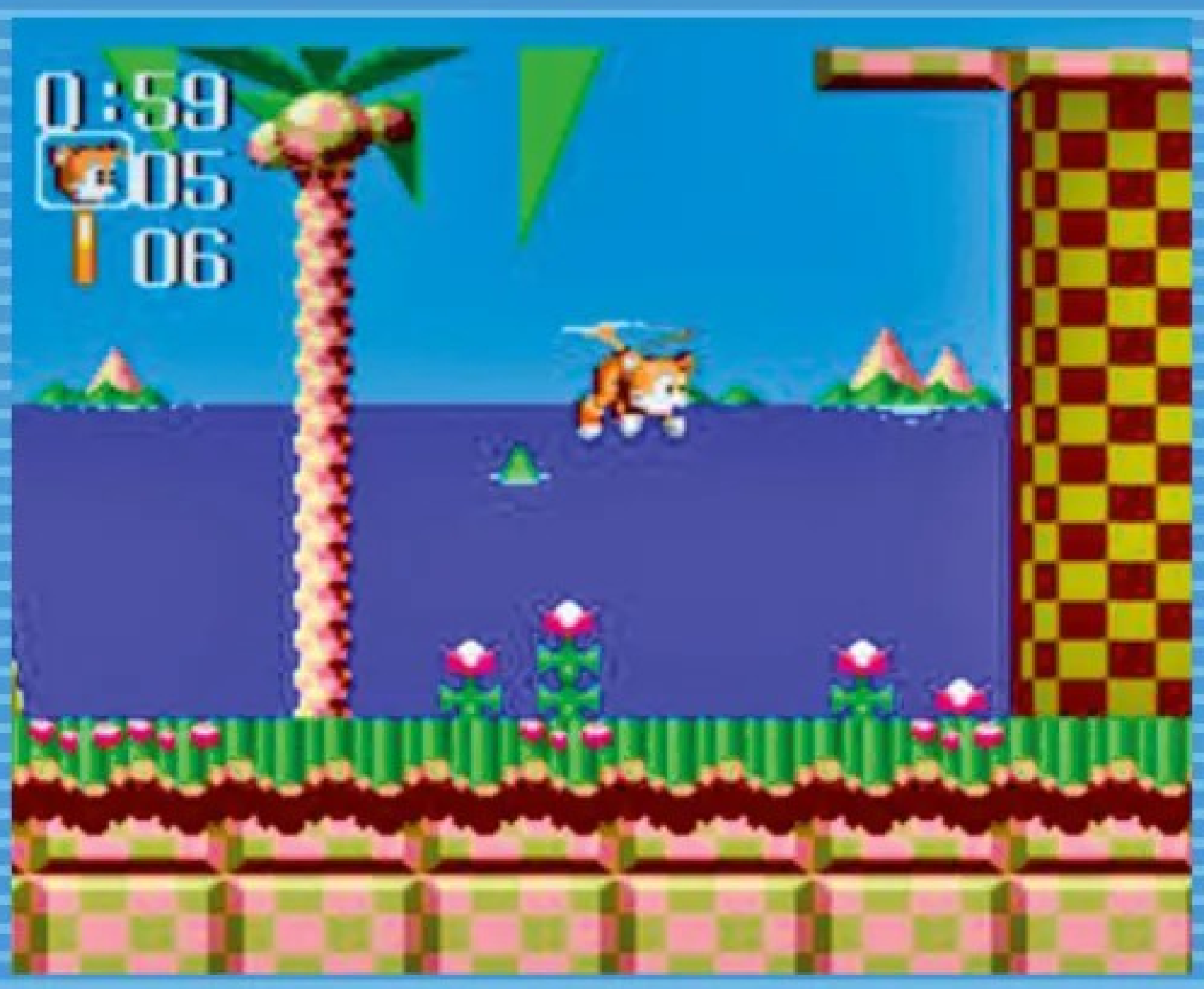
■ At the finale of *Sonic 2*, Robotnik is defeated and Tails turns up in the Tornado to fly Sonic to safety.



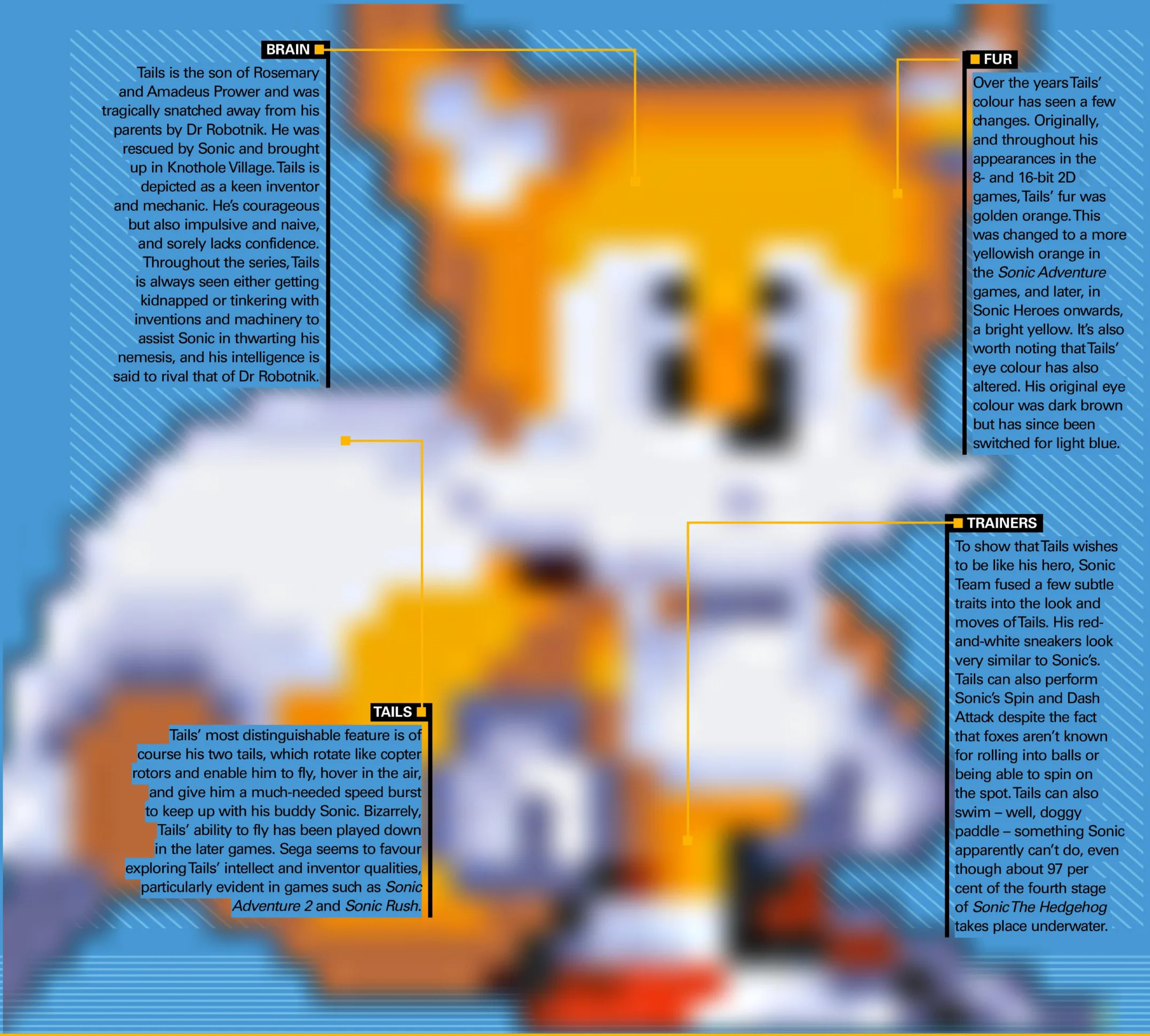
■ Tails finally gets his chance to shine in *SA2* when Sonic leaves him to battle Robotnik alone.



■ Sonic witnesses Tails' capture by Robotnik even though Sonic returns home to find a ransom note?



■ *Sonic Chaos* on the SMS marks the first time players could control Tails in flight.



BRAIN

Tails is the son of Rosemary and Amadeus Prower and was tragically snatched away from his parents by Dr Robotnik. He was rescued by Sonic and brought up in Knothole Village. Tails is depicted as a keen inventor and mechanic. He's courageous but also impulsive and naive, and sorely lacks confidence. Throughout the series, Tails is always seen either getting kidnapped or tinkering with inventions and machinery to assist Sonic in thwarting his nemesis, and his intelligence is said to rival that of Dr Robotnik.

FUR

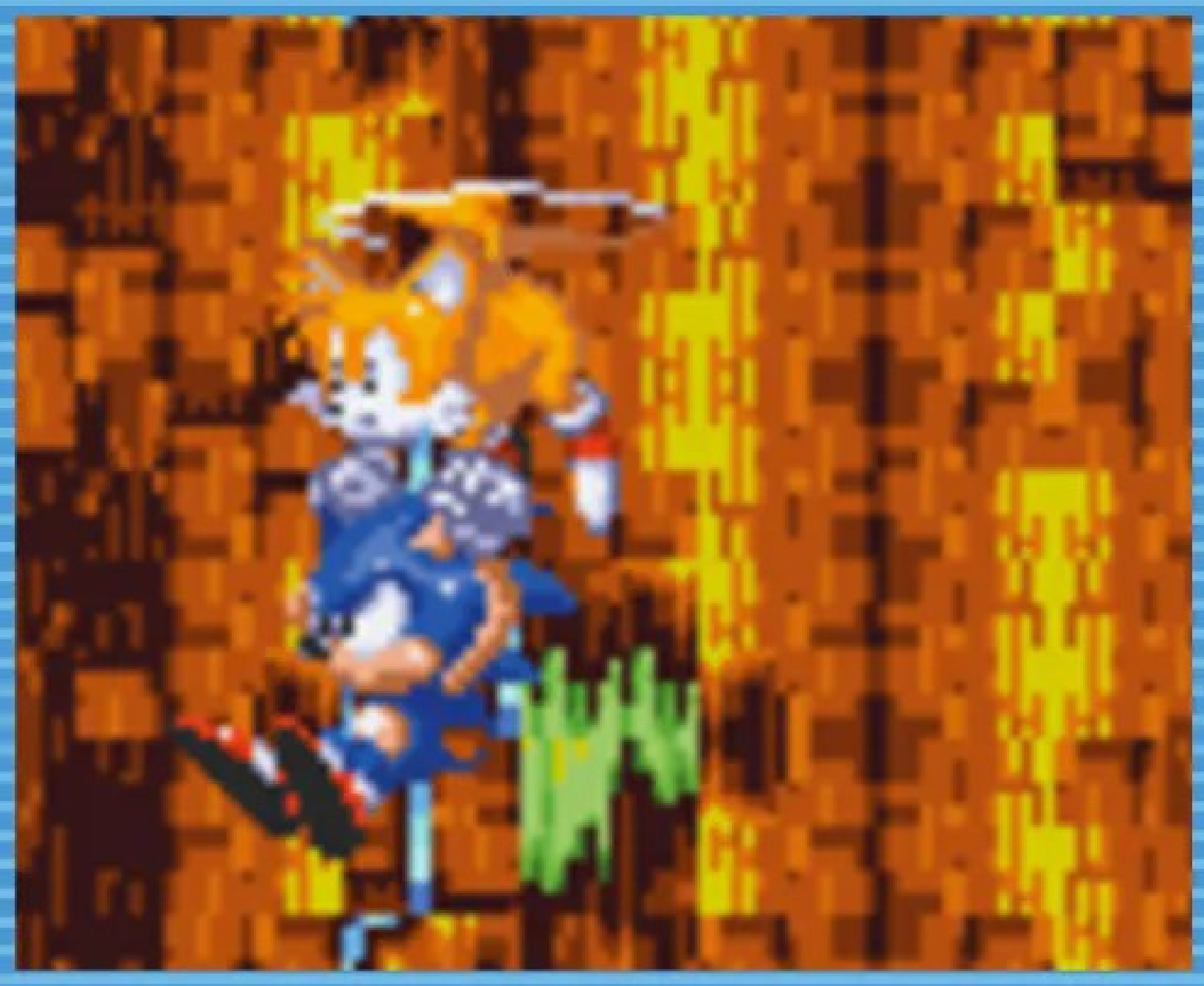
Over the years Tails' colour has seen a few changes. Originally, and throughout his appearances in the 8- and 16-bit 2D games, Tails' fur was golden orange. This was changed to a more yellowish orange in the *Sonic Adventure* games, and later, in Sonic Heroes onwards, a bright yellow. It's also worth noting that Tails' eye colour has also altered. His original eye colour was dark brown but has since been switched for light blue.

TAILS

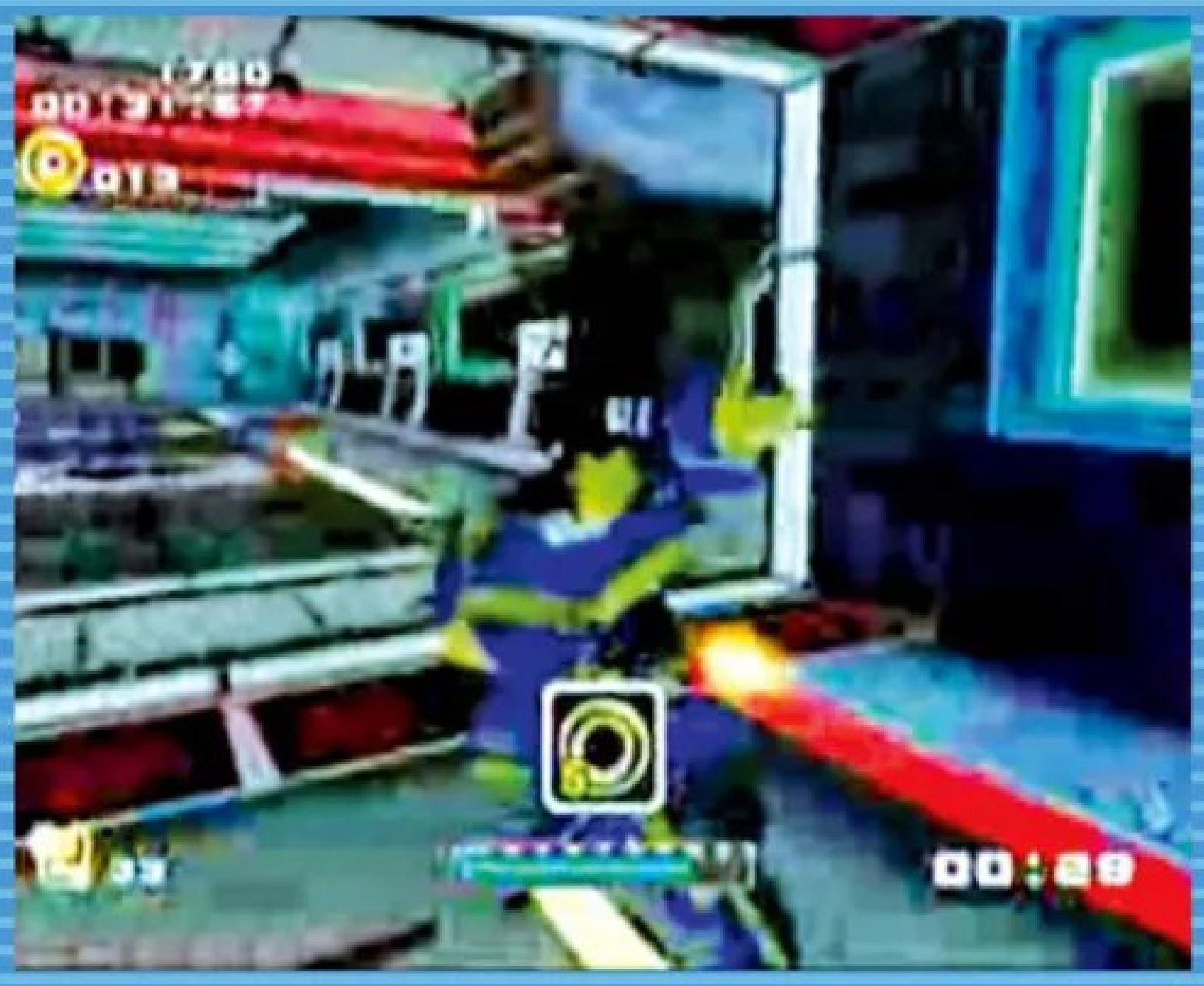
Tails' most distinguishable feature is of course his two tails, which rotate like copter rotors and enable him to fly, hover in the air, and give him a much-needed speed burst to keep up with his buddy Sonic. Bizarrely, Tails' ability to fly has been played down in the later games. Sega seems to favour exploring Tails' intellect and inventor qualities, particularly evident in games such as *Sonic Adventure 2* and *Sonic Rush*.

TRAINERS

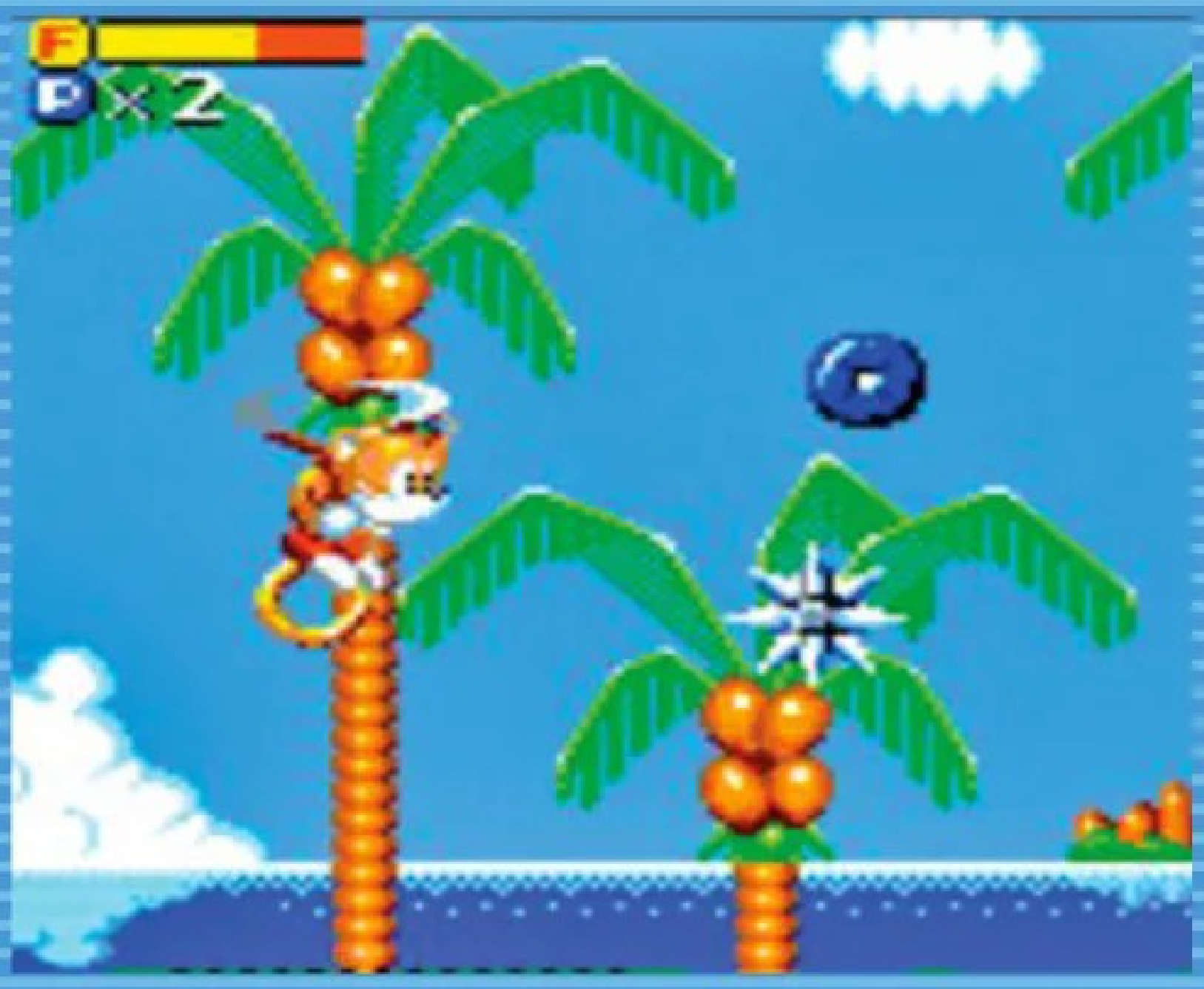
To show that Tails wishes to be like his hero, Sonic Team fused a few subtle traits into the look and moves of Tails. His red-and-white sneakers look very similar to Sonic's. Tails can also perform Sonic's Spin and Dash Attack despite the fact that foxes aren't known for rolling into balls or being able to spin on the spot. Tails can also swim – well, doggy paddle – something Sonic apparently can't do, even though about 97 per cent of the fourth stage of *Sonic The Hedgehog* takes place underwater.



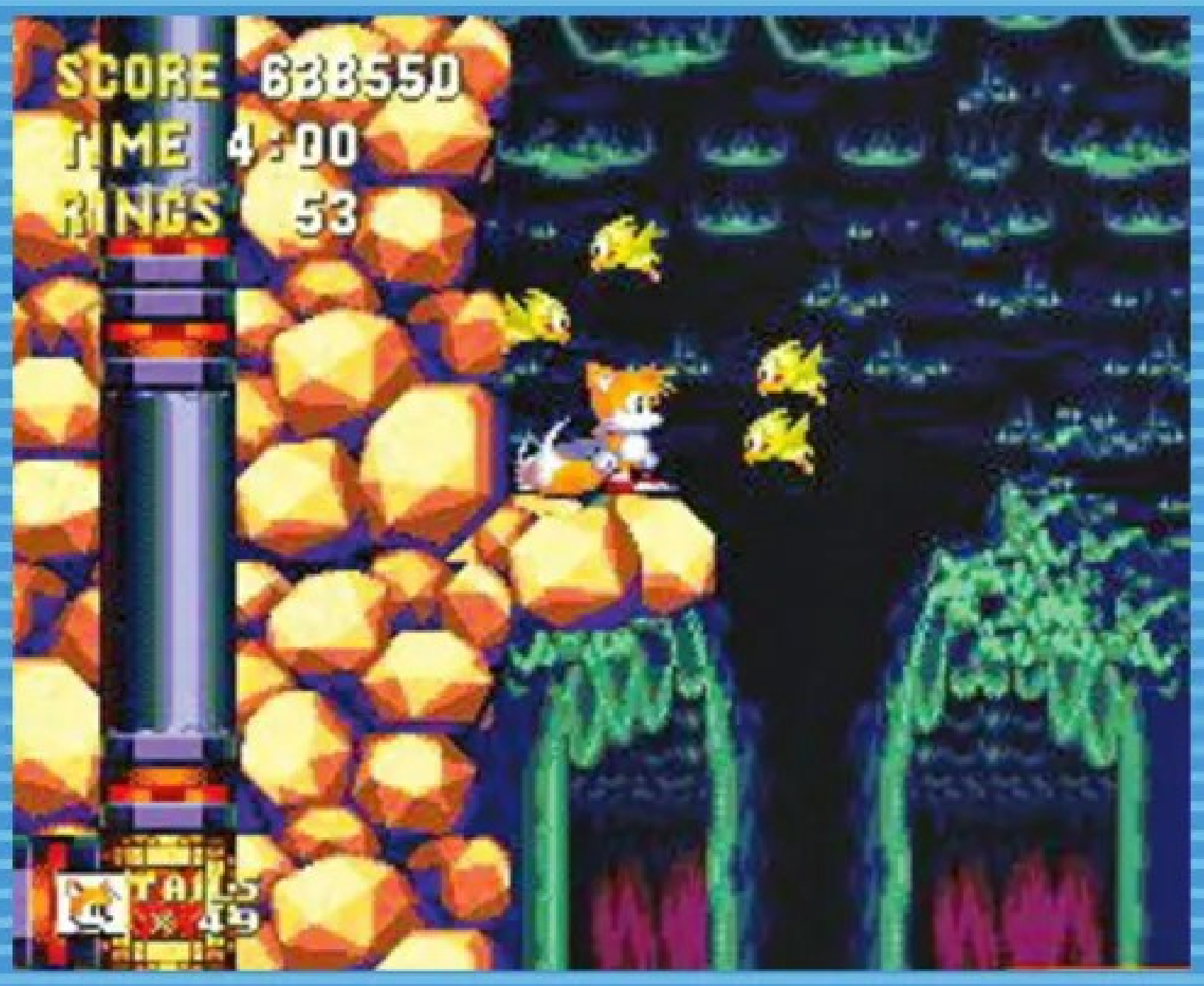
■ In *Sonic 3*, Tails could pick up Sonic (and Knuckles, if playing it with the *S&K* cartridge).



■ In *Sonic Adventure 2*, Tails gets to use the Cyclone's Mech mode to great effect.



■ Tails' first solo title was a Japan-only puzzle game released for the Game Gear.

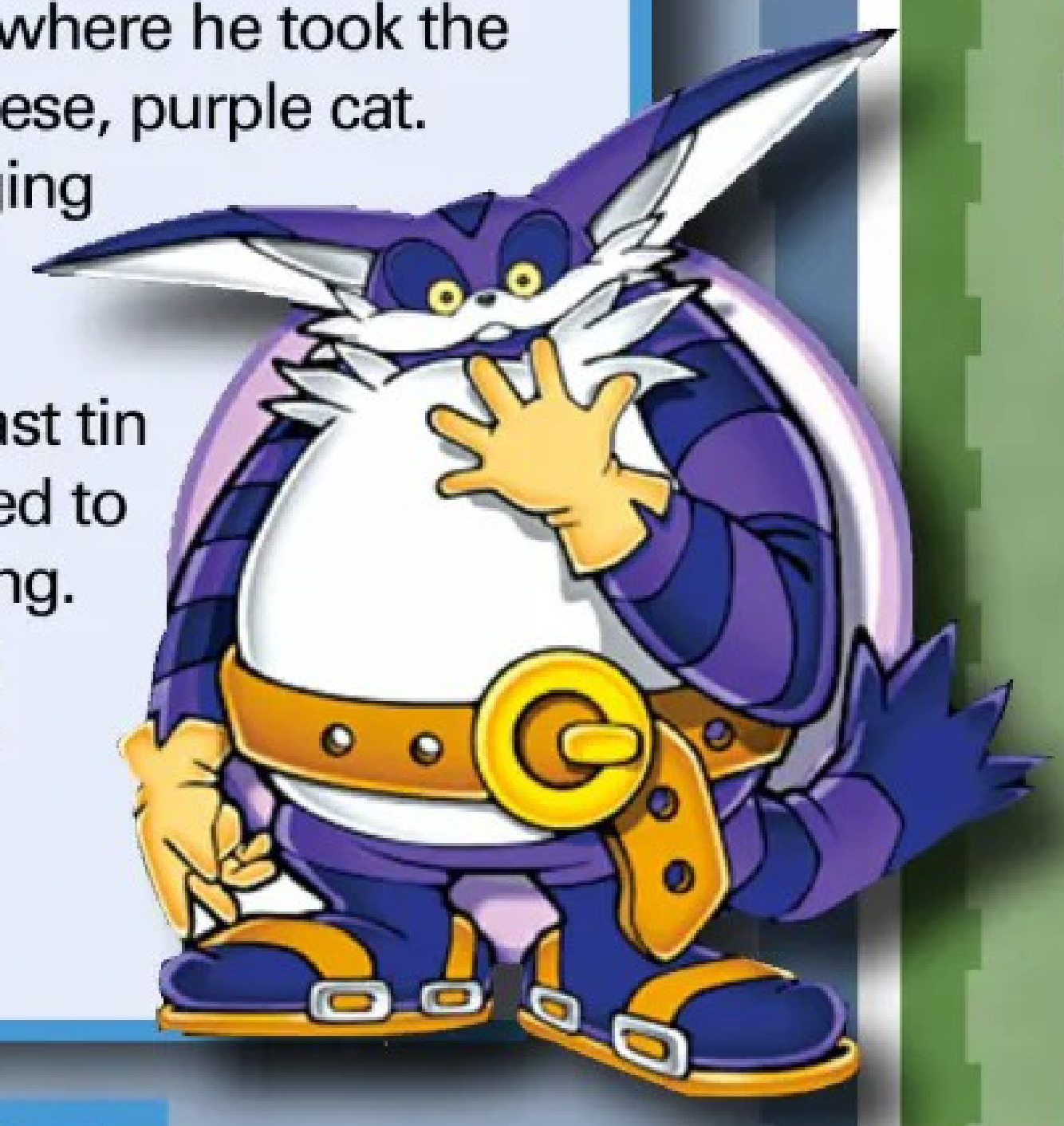


■ *Sonic 3* introduced us to Super Tails. He can fly longer, run faster and is surrounded by Flickies.

SONIC ALL-STARS: THE VERY WORST GAMING MASCOTS

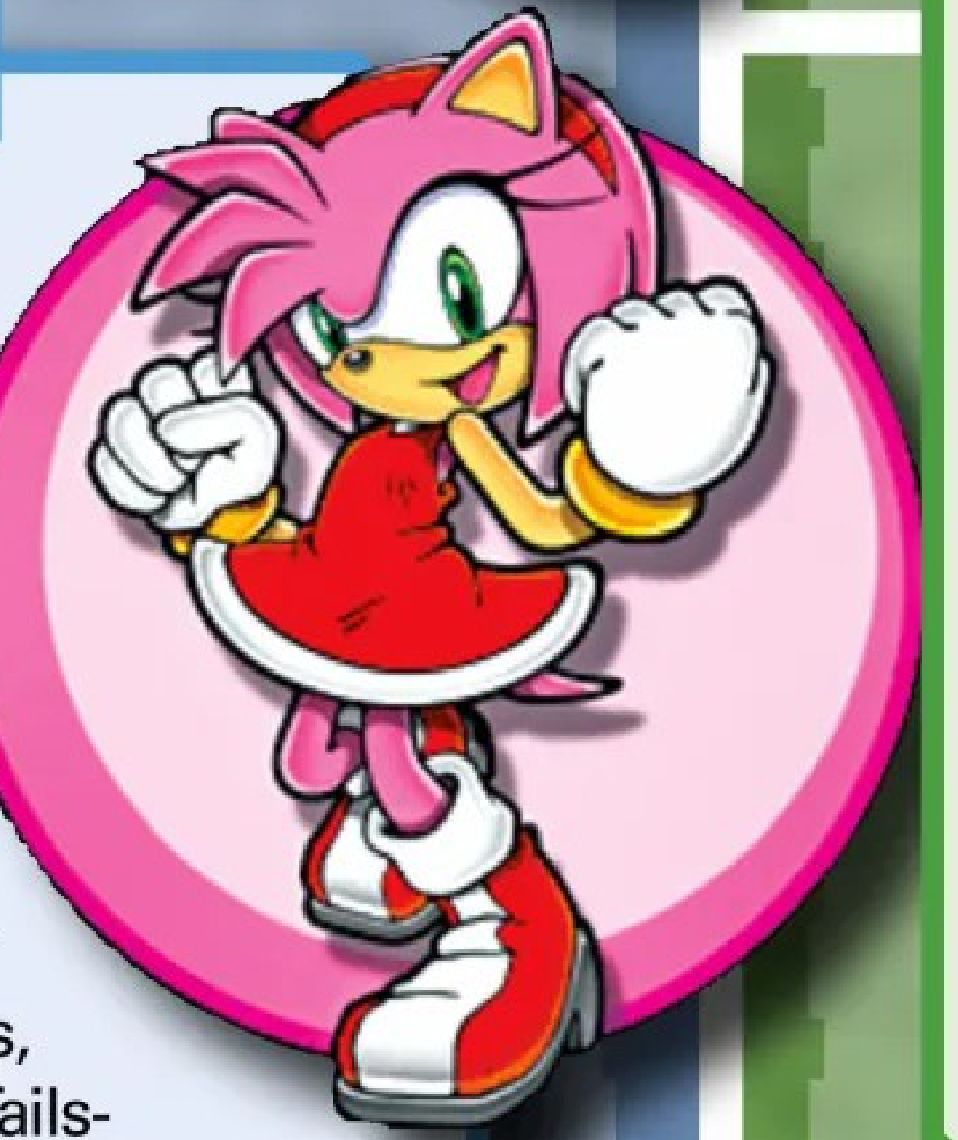
BIG THE CAT

■ Looking like a demigod from *Spirited Away*, Big the Cat is uncharacteristic of typical *Sonic* characters. His first appearance was in *Sonic Adventure*, where he took the form of a big-hearted, obese, purple cat. And if that wasn't damaging enough, Sega was angling to eke more verve out of the Dreamcast tin opener and Big was forced to have a penchant for fishing. Moreover, his best friend is a frog who acts like he hates him. Poor Big.



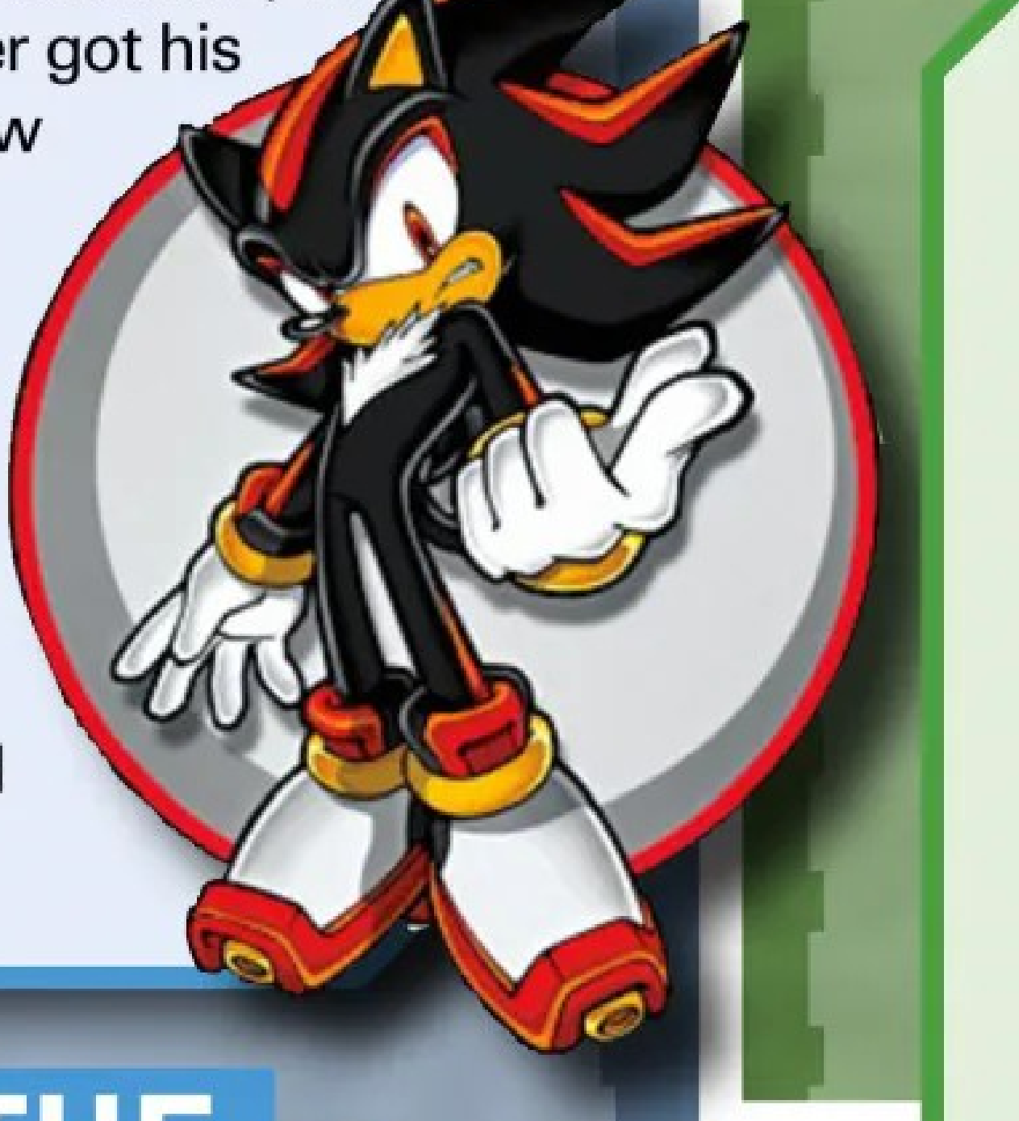
AMY ROSE

■ A debutante in the *Sonic The Hedgehog* manga, Amy was later introduced into the videogame canon via *Sonic CD*. Amy is a pink and squeaky version of Sonic, who wears a Mrs Claus outfit and wields a hammer. Showing the excessive extent to which the series would later add superfluous sub-characters, Amy was later given her own Tails-type sidekick in the form of Cream the Rabbit, whose exclusion from this list is probably a large oversight on our part.



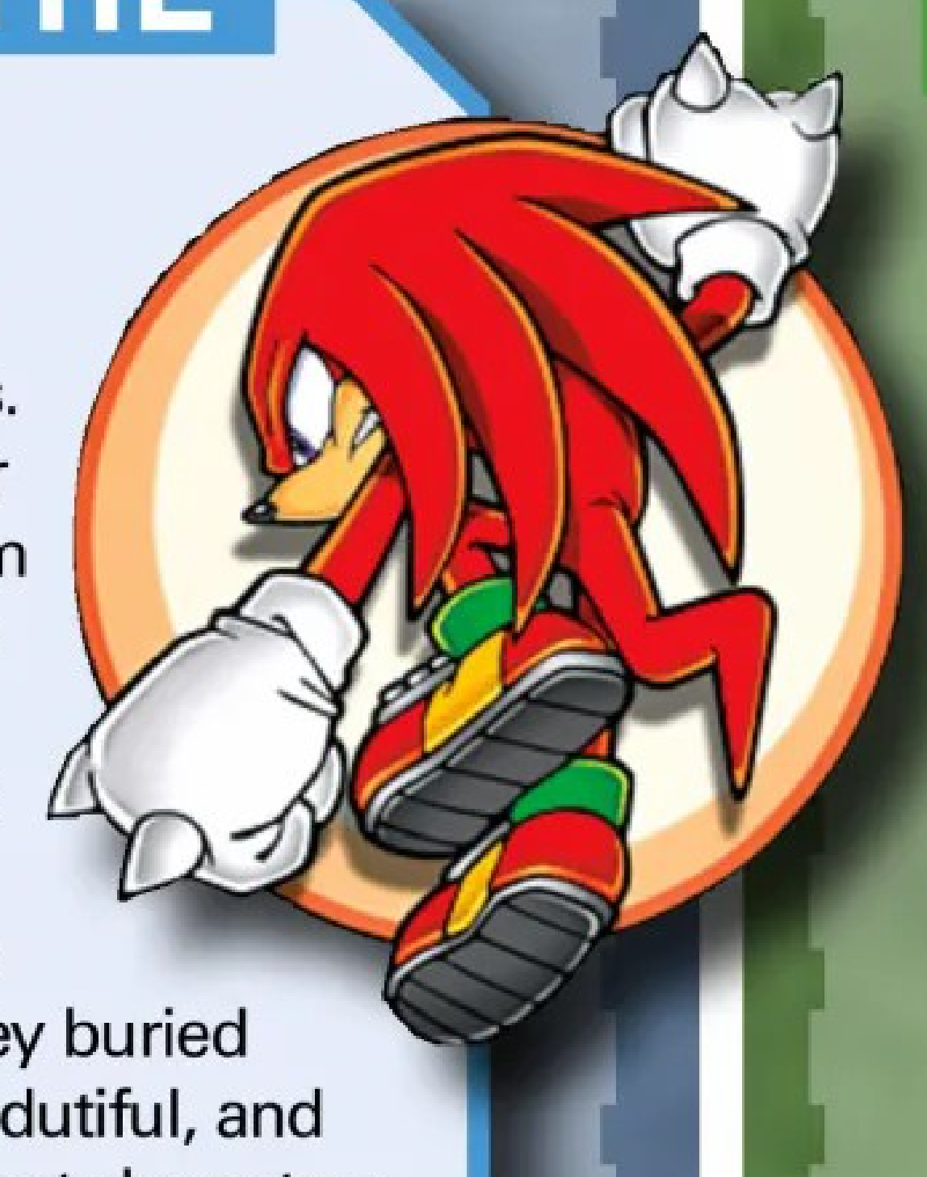
SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

■ Shadow is a sinister version of Sonic. He first popped up in *Sonic Adventure 2*, in which he was great, but he later got his own game that wasn't, and now he's not. Despite getting his speed from a pair of boots, having red highlights, and using firearms, Shadow is the 'ultimate life form' and was the handiwork of the late Gerald Robotnik (Robotnik's grandfather). He shares a bond with Robotnik's cousin, Maria.



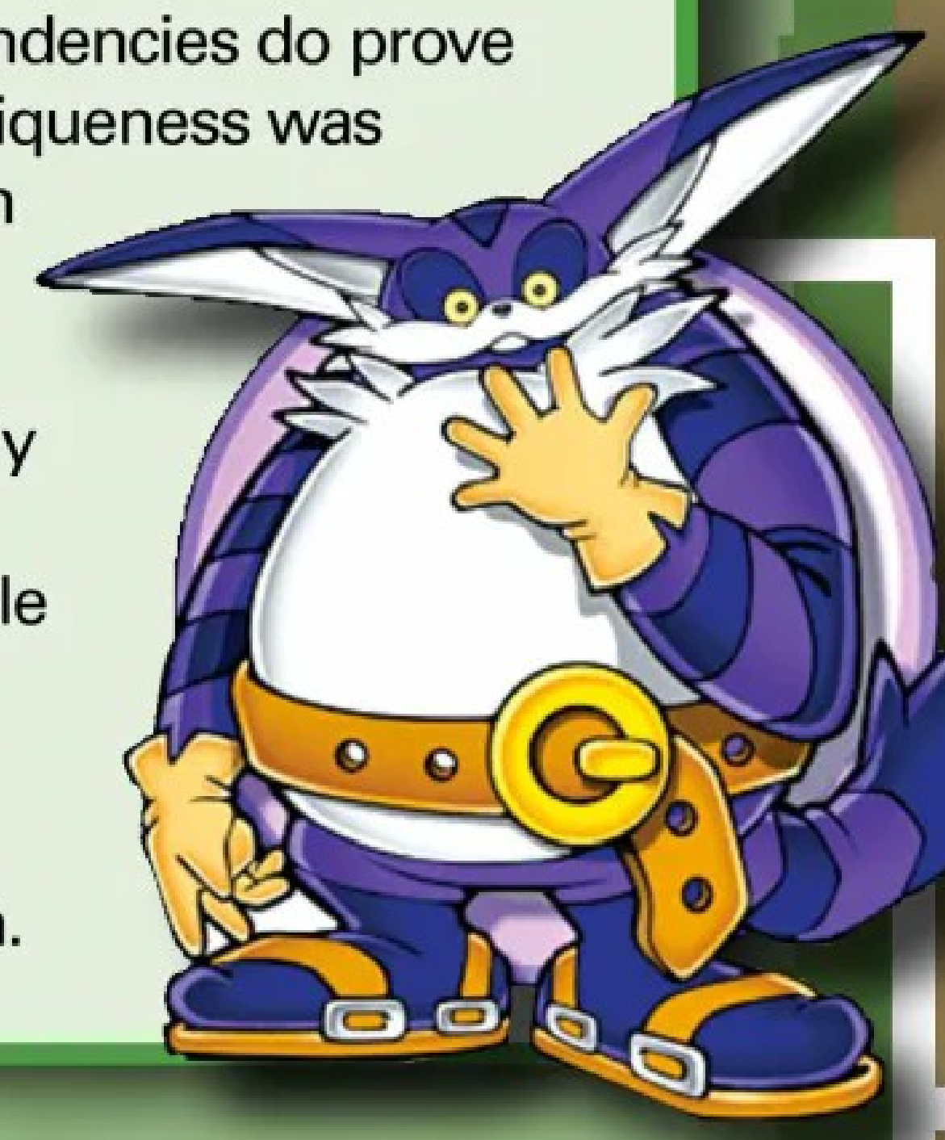
KNUCKLES THE ECHIDNA

■ Knuckles the echidna is basically Sonic with dreadlocks. His power comes from his four spiky knuckles, which allow him to glide through the air, smash boulders, and climb walls. Knuckles' first appearance was in *Sonic 3*, where he played the antagonist and first rival to Sonic the Hedgehog before they buried the hatchet. Knuckles is tough, dutiful, and resilient, and one of the strongest characters in the series.



BIG THE CAT

■ Introducing a female love interest for Sonic was predictable, and painting her pink was perhaps even more banal, but Amy's bunny-boiling tendencies do prove that some degree of uniqueness was fused into her being. On the other hand, Big certainly sticks out from the crowd – as only a fat, purple, fishing cat could do – and the whole Studio Ghibli look is very endearing. But we simply can't shake that lame fishing connection.

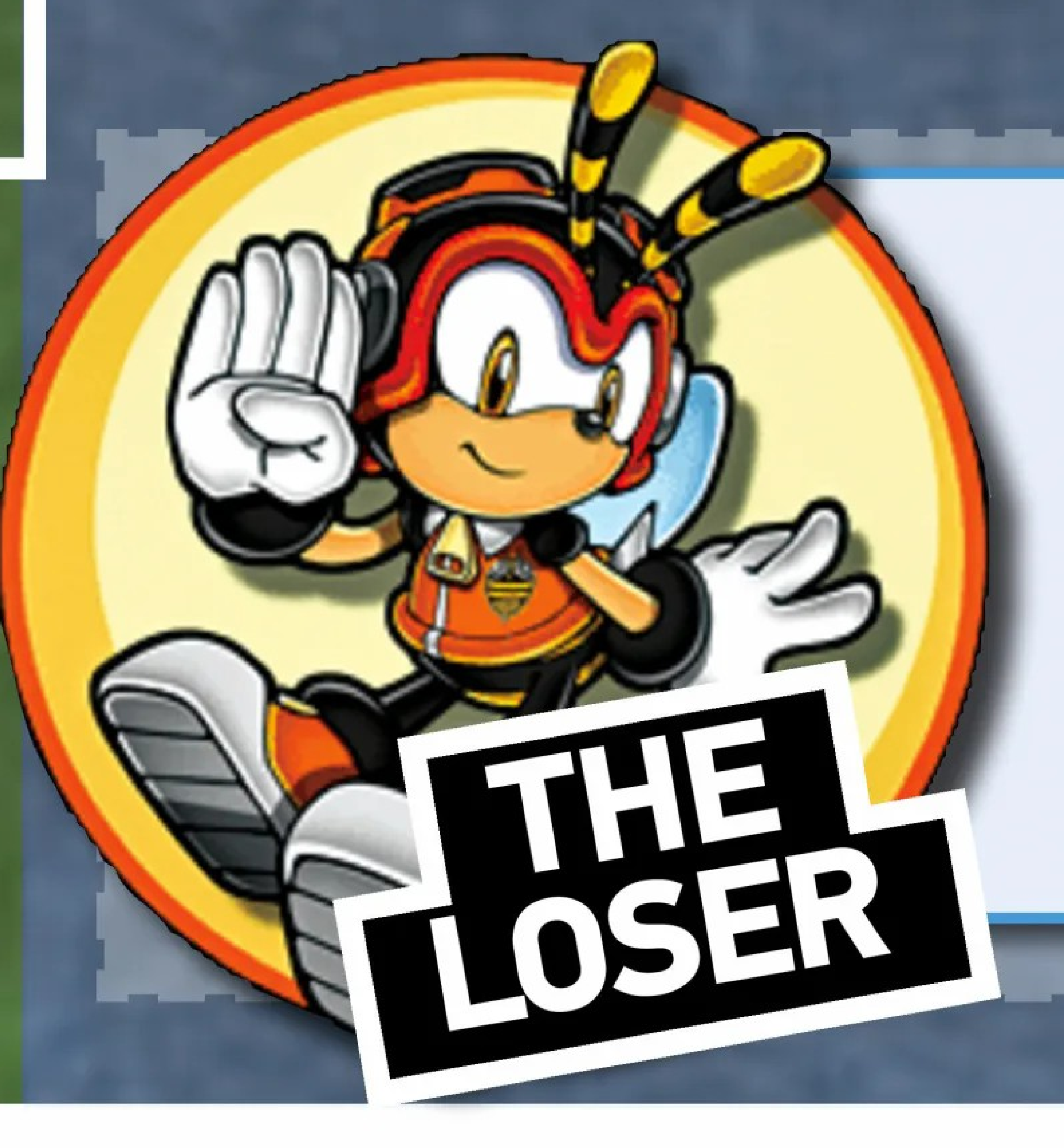


SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

■ On one side we have Knuckles, an angry version of Sonic, with a curtain haircut, and knuckle deformity, and on the other we have Shadow the Hedgehog, an evil version of Sonic, with rocket boots and highlights. Shadow's self-titled game pushed the series into some bizarre realms – and not in a good way. Shadow may be the people's silver medalist, but he's not out of the woods yet.

BIG THE CAT

■ Big is here because he forced us to fish in a *Sonic* title. Shadow's here because he made us drive a motorbike and fire guns in a *Sonic* title. It's anyone's game. Shadow, however, impressed us in *Sonic Adventure 2* and, through his deep and tragic origin story, has remained the most interesting *Sonic* rival to date. Big, on the other hand, is a fishing cat whose best friend is a frog called Froggy. Clearly the Cat claws a victory.



THE INTRODUCTION OF TAILS IN SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2 WAS AN INSPIRED ADDITION TO THE SONIC UNIVERSE, BUT WITH EACH PASSING SEQUEL, SONIC TEAM HAS ADDED AN INCREASINGLY TERRIBLE NEW CHARACTER. BUT WHICH IS THE WORST OF THE WORST? WE USE SOME OF THE MOST SCIENTIFIC METHODS KNOWN TO MAN TO FIND OUT

CHARMY BEE

■ The outcome of this match is decided before it's begun. Espio's here because he's a ninja stereotype who looks like a character from *The Land Before Time*, Charmy got to the semi-final because he provides comic relief that's as funny as watching *My Family* with subtitles on. In Charmy's favour, he is the only insect character in the *Sonic* universe, but Espio knows ninjitsu and has a voice that could win an election.

CHARMY BEE

■ In one corner we have one of the biggest competitors in this competition; in the other, we have the smallest. That Big looks nothing like any of the other typical Sonic characters – though he does share a certain resemblance to Robotnik – earns him some kudos. Plus, unlike Charmy Bee, Big actually provides a few comic moments. Consequently, an annoying mascot for a surplus team of sub-characters must be declared the ultimate loser.

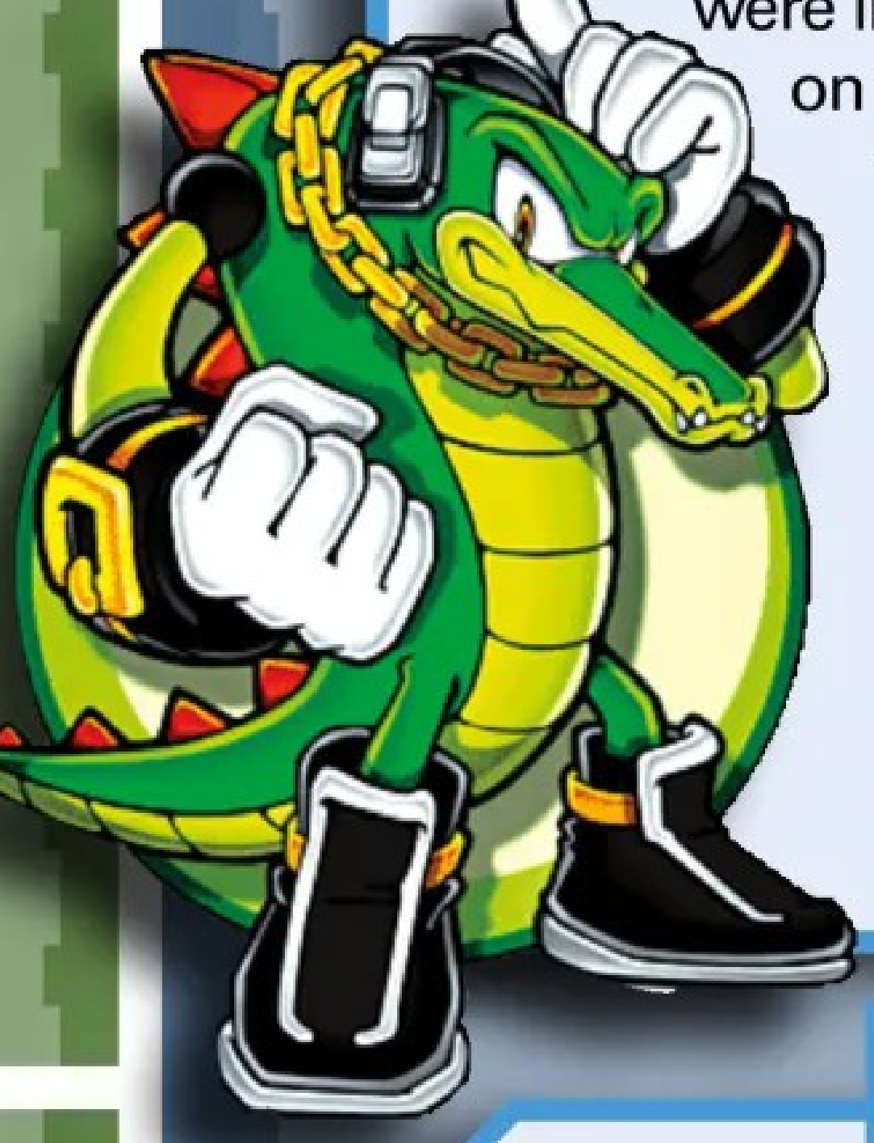
ESPIO THE CHAMELEON

■ This is a close pairing. Vector's strength is his brute power, an attribute that has recently seen him appear as a playable character in *Mario And Sonic At The Olympic Games*. He's bossy and hulking, but is a mostly amiable member of Team Chaotix while Espio is a ninja-type character who sticks unwaveringly to typical ninja stereotypes and has a face shaped like a triceratops. Espio wins.

CHARMY BEE

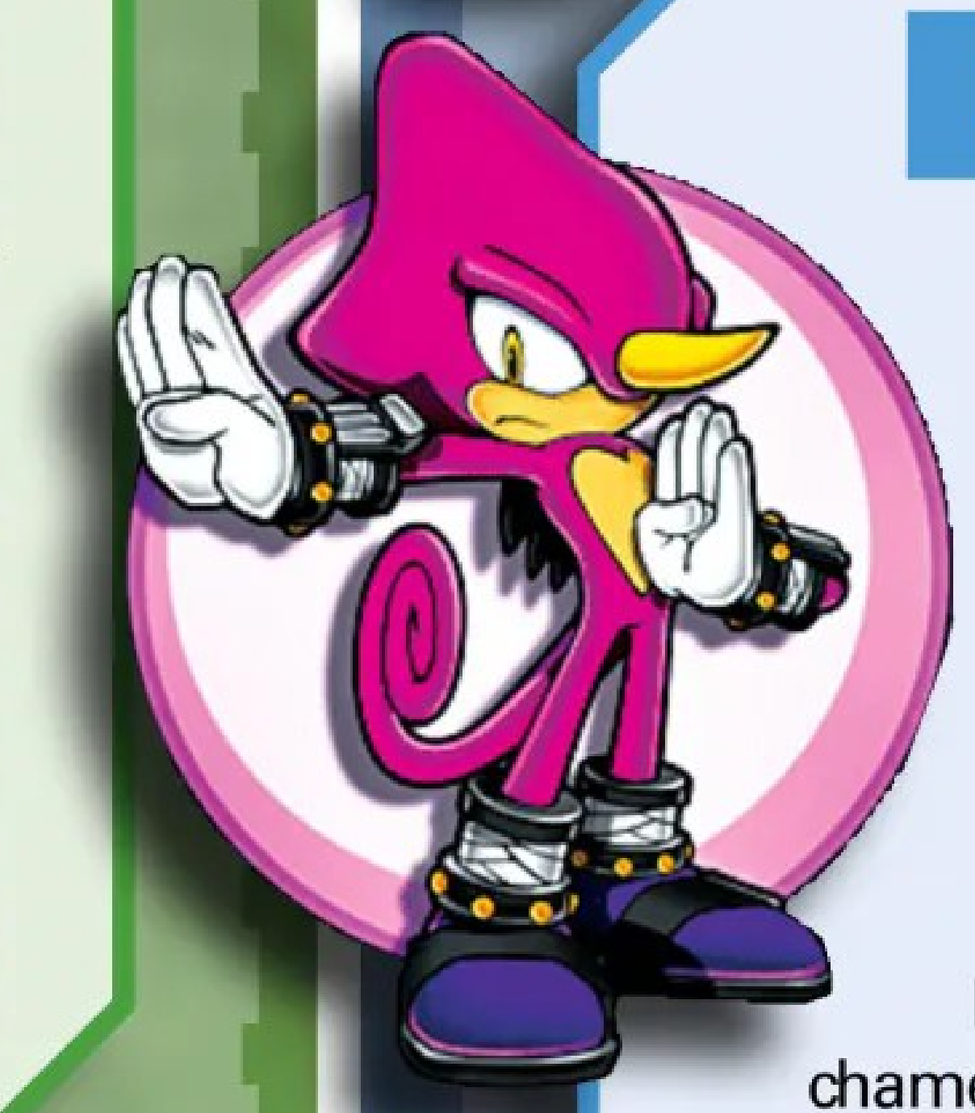
■ Rouge is clearly influenced by such comic-book villains as Catwoman and Black Cat. The whole treasure-hunter facet to her character works well, tying in her mania for nicking the Chaos Emeralds, but the whole government spy thing is laying it on a bit thick. Charmy Bee is a character whose briefest appearances grate, turning the *Sonic* games into an interactive Saturday-morning kids' TV show.

VECTOR THE CROCODILE



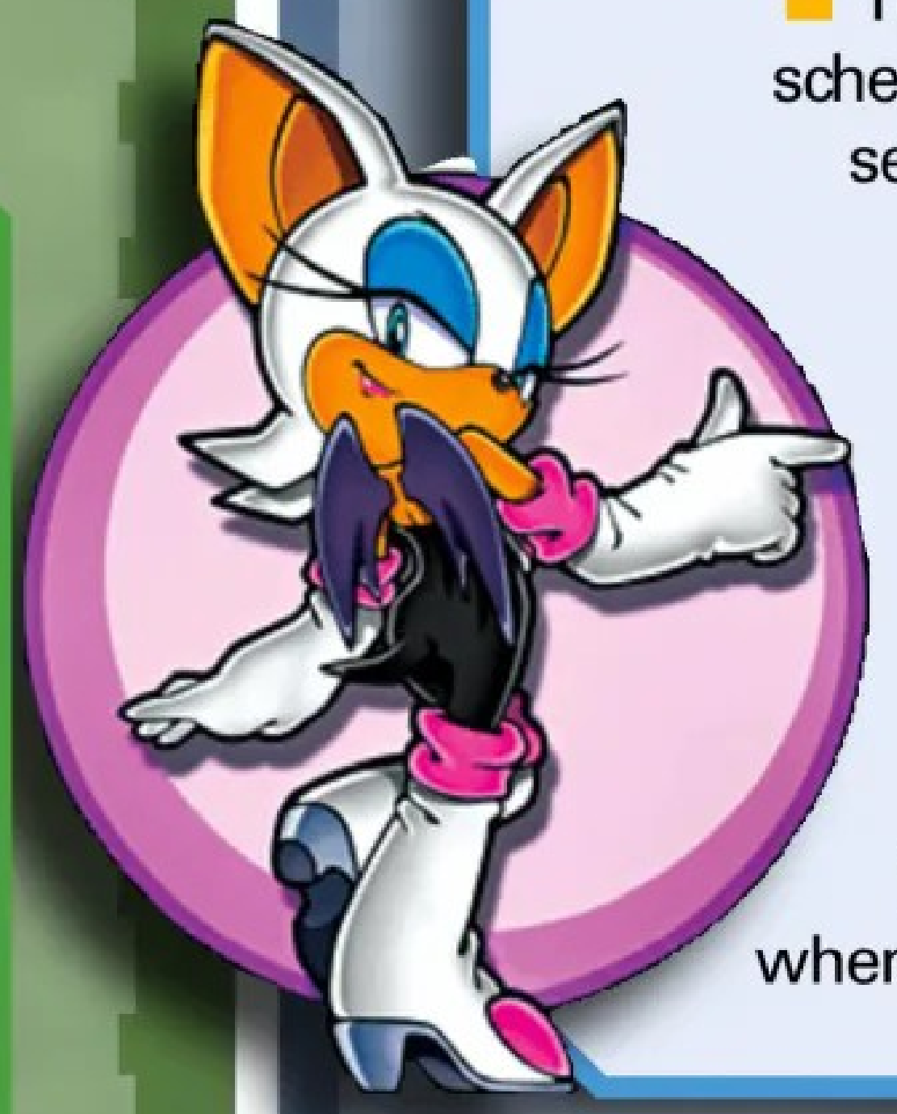
■ Vector is the leader of a team of sub-characters known as Team Chaotix who were introduced in *Knuckles' Chaotix* on the 32X. To confuse matters, in that game the team integrated Knuckles and was led by Mighty the Armadillo, who was considered for the part of the main protagonist in the Sonic games before Yuji Naka settled on a hedgehog. Vector is a powerful crocodile who wears headphones.

ESPIO THE CHAMELEON



■ If Vector is the brawn of Team Chaotix, then Espio is the brains. He is a pink Chameleon with a prominent horn where a nose would be. Espio is a ninja-type character, which, predictably, makes him the honourable, serious, and methodical member of the group. Because his character is loosely based on a chameleon, Espio has the power to turn invisible and fix himself to walls and ceilings. He's also the fastest member of Team Chaotix.

ROUGE THE BAT



■ The villainous vamp, Rouge is the scheming, unsavoury, and purposely sexed-up character who made her inaugural appearance in *Sonic Adventure 2*, where she played a career-thief-cum-secret-government-agent. Rouge has the power to fly and attack with her stiletto boots, and is seen as a female rival/love interest to Knuckles. She resembles Jerry in those Tom and Jerry episodes when he pretends to be a girl mouse.

CHARMY BEE

■ Charmy Bee is the final and most chalkboard-scratching member of Team Chaotix. He's painted as a juvenile mascot character to the entourage and manages to bring very little of interest to the *Sonic* series other than some perfunctory clowning juvenilia that feels like it's being poured into your head by pixies. Charmy Bee's childish appearance, grating voice, and cringingly abysmal dialogue make him a standout favourite for the contest.

FOX MCCLOUD

Star Fox was Nintendo's first true foray into the world of 3D gaming, starring a cast of anthropomorphic animals, and led by one sly fox

ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** FOX MCCLOUD
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** STAR FOX
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER SMASH BROS ULTIMATE
- **» FINEST HOUR:** STAR FOX 64 3D
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** BARREL ROLLS

Shigeru Miyamoto's fertile imagination is the inspiration behind some of the most popular videogame characters in the world, and if you take the time to dig a little bit deeper into their history you can often uncover some quirky little yarn relating to their creation.

The Chain Chomps in *Super Mario Bros 3*, for instance, are said to be based on a shackled dog that terrorised the young designer on his walk to school every morning, while the three central players in *Donkey Kong* – Jumpman, Donkey Kong and Lady – are rumoured to be loosely based on Popeye, Bluto, and Olive Oyl. Fox McCloud, the intrepid leader of the mercenary squadron Star Fox, was the product of a magical bipedal fox that used to keep Miyamoto awake at night by driving spaceships up and down his street till the early hours of the morning. Well, that last tale was admittedly a tall one, but the reality involves a bit of a history lesson.

Known as Kitsune in Japan, the fox has played a significant role in Japanese folklore. Most tales describe them as intelligent beings, guardians possessing magical powers, with the ability to manifest into human form. Fox McCloud's is inexorably linked to this ancient belief. Inside the Fushimi Inari-Taisha shrine in Kyoto, Japan, sits an important monument: a sacred statue of the Japanese god Inari. Inari is portrayed as a fox that wears a distinctive red scarf, and it's here the inspiration behind the stoic and steadfast protector of the Lylat System is found. As the story goes, after visiting the shrine while pondering which animal could play the central role in his 3D space shooter, Miyamoto took inspiration from the spiritual statue. Borrowing the facial features and scarf of Inari, Miyamoto's intention was to then try to breathe his own personality into the character.

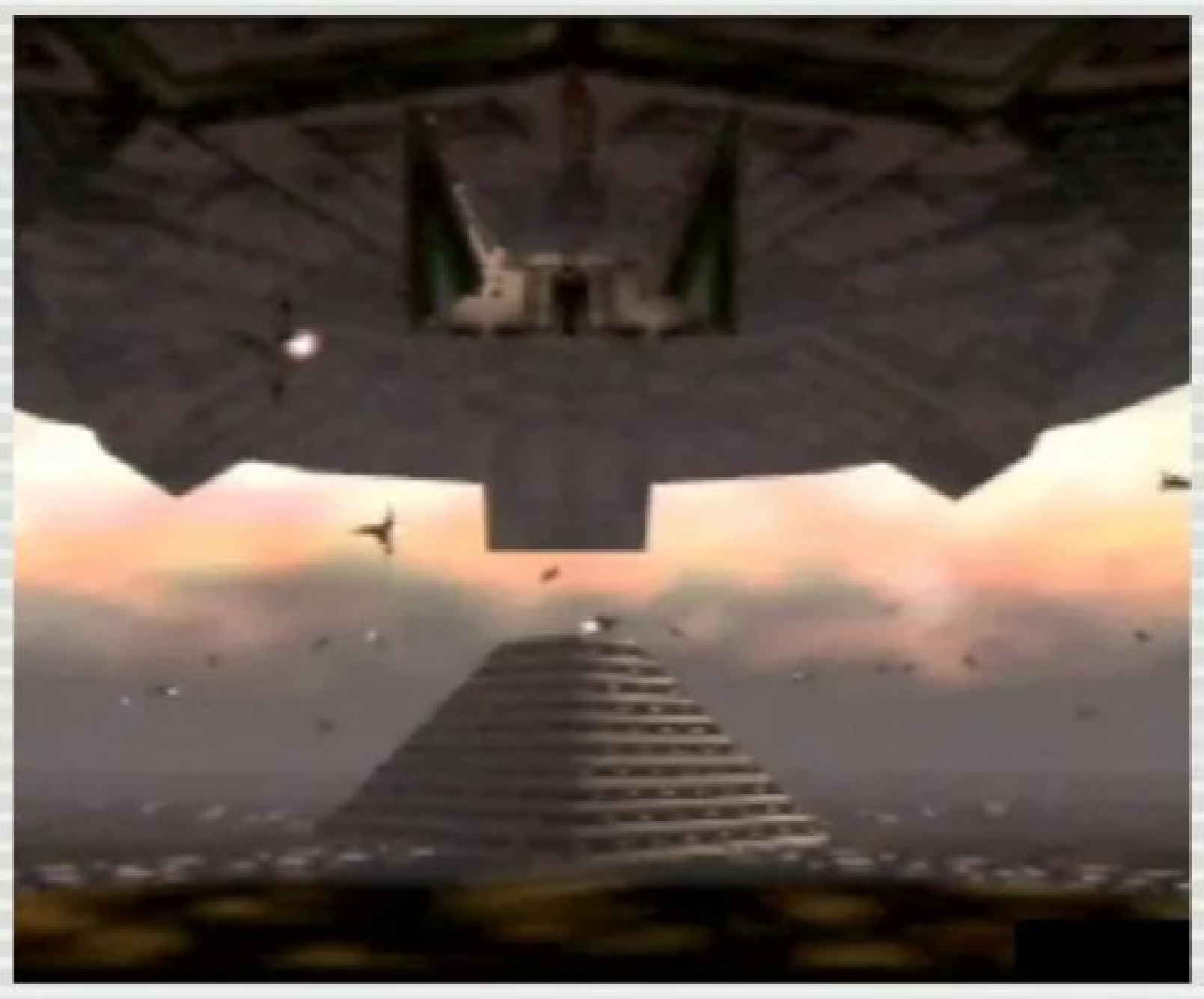
It's clear that *Star Fox* draws influences from sci-fi cinema – most predominantly the *Star Wars* films. In fact, if you listen to Fox barking orders in *Star Fox 64*, you may notice that he sounds uncannily like Luke Skywalker, which we very much doubt is a coincidence. *Star Fox*'s experimental fighter craft, the Arwing, also have a familiar X-wing feel to them. And certain stages in the games nod knowingly to some of the classic space battles in *Star Wars*, in particular the final Death Star assault, and Empire's epic battle on Hoth.

As far as Fox's back story goes, his leadership qualities were passed down to him from his father James McCloud, who founded and led the original Star Fox team. In the intro to *Star Fox 64* we learn that James and Peppy were betrayed by Pigma during a routine investigative mission on the planet Venom. Upon arriving on Venom, James and Peppy are captured by the maniacal scientist Andross and James is killed. During the skirmish, Peppy escapes and recount James's fate to his son, Fox. With the passing of the years, Andross's power grows, and his grip on the Lylat System slowly tightens. It is then that Fox decides to drop out of the Cornerian Air Force and lead a new Star Fox team to protect the Lylat System. Needless to say, his desire to follow in the footsteps of his deceased father draws yet another parallel with the Star Wars saga.

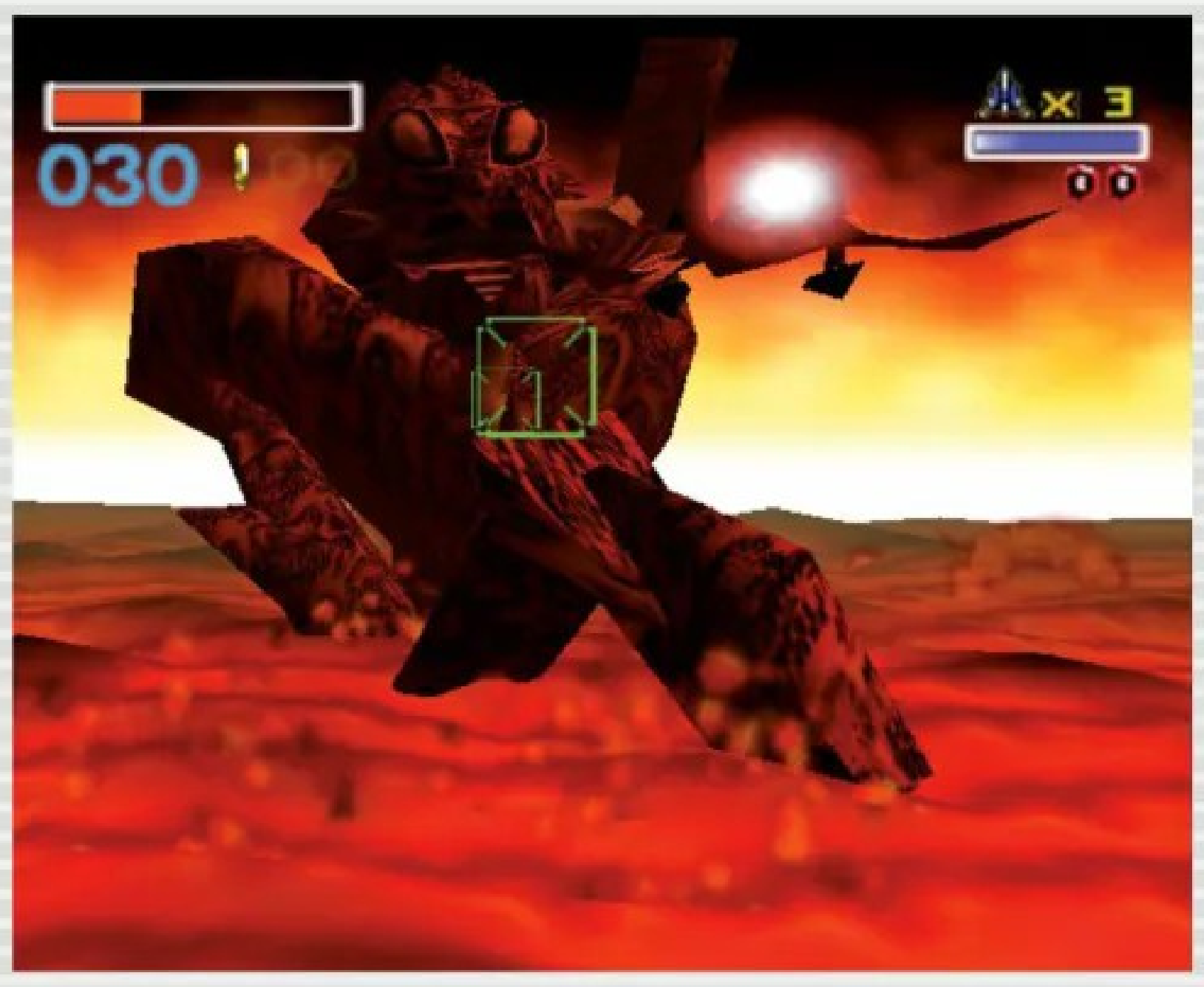
As well as the dazzling 3D visuals, what many people remember about *Star Fox* was the way its story and gripping character arcs were drip-fed through the peculiar com-channel dialogue boxes, which played an integral part in the gameplay. The ease of progress is generally reliant on the safety and protection of Fox's wingmen – lose a team-mate during a mission and you really feel their absence in the next mission as their Arwing docks for repair. The banter, while generally filled with gung-ho dialogue from Falco and panicky trepidation from Slippy, served as an easy way for Fox to keep a beady check on his team-mates while also imparting a real sense that you were leading a band of pilots into battle, their welfare in your hands.

What really sets Fox McCloud apart from most other videogame heroes we're featuring in this book is that from the very first mission he already has the skills to complete his challenge. Instead of forcing us to level up and nurture Fox's skills during the game, we're already entrusted with his legendary status and piloting skills from the start. Your team immediately look up to you, Andross's minions already come to fear you, and you really feel like the hirsute protector of the Lylat System, the legendary Star Fox pilot, Fox McCloud. ✱

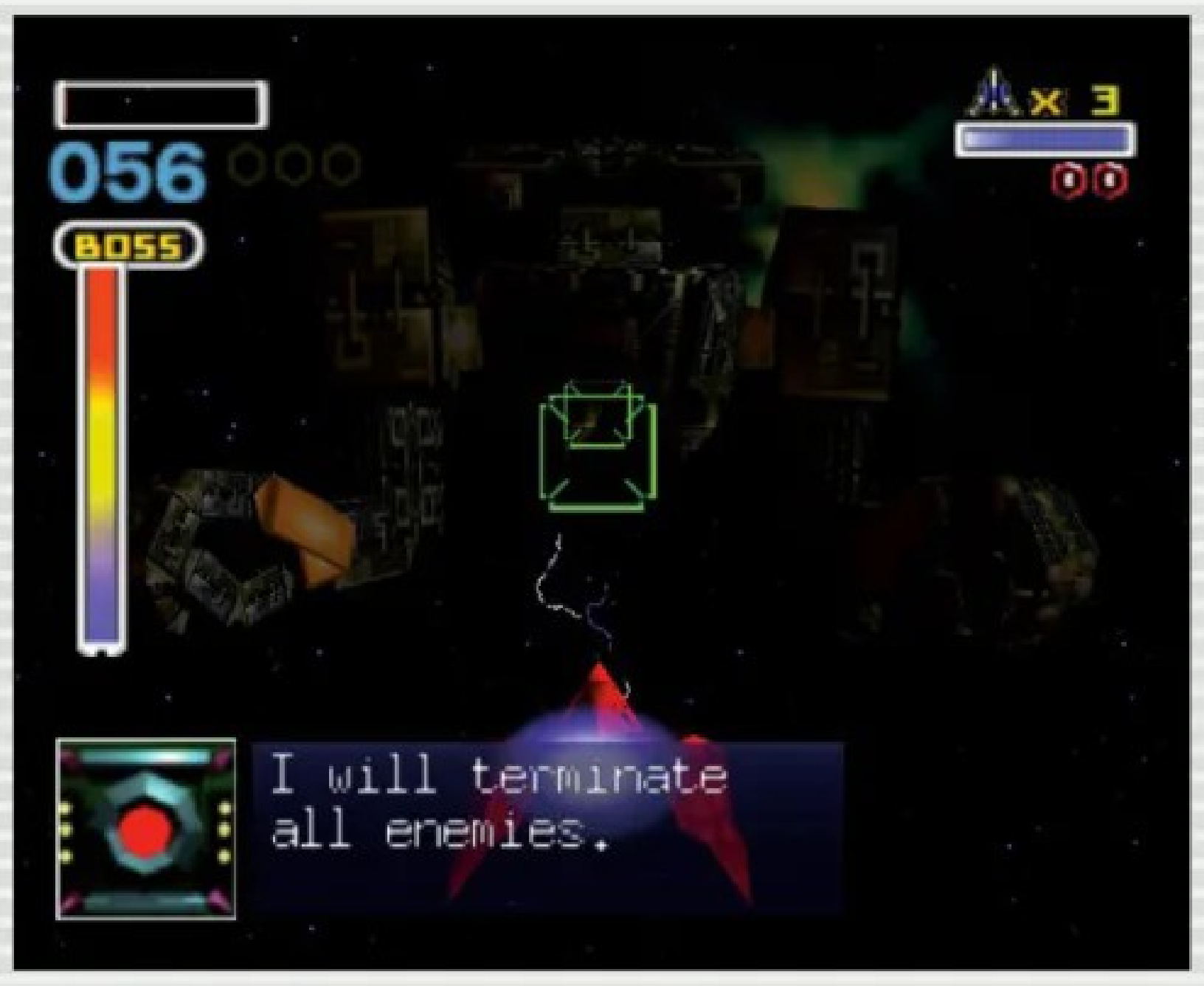
> MAGIC MOMENTS



A blatant *Independence Day* rip-off, you even fly into the belly of the mothership to destroy it.

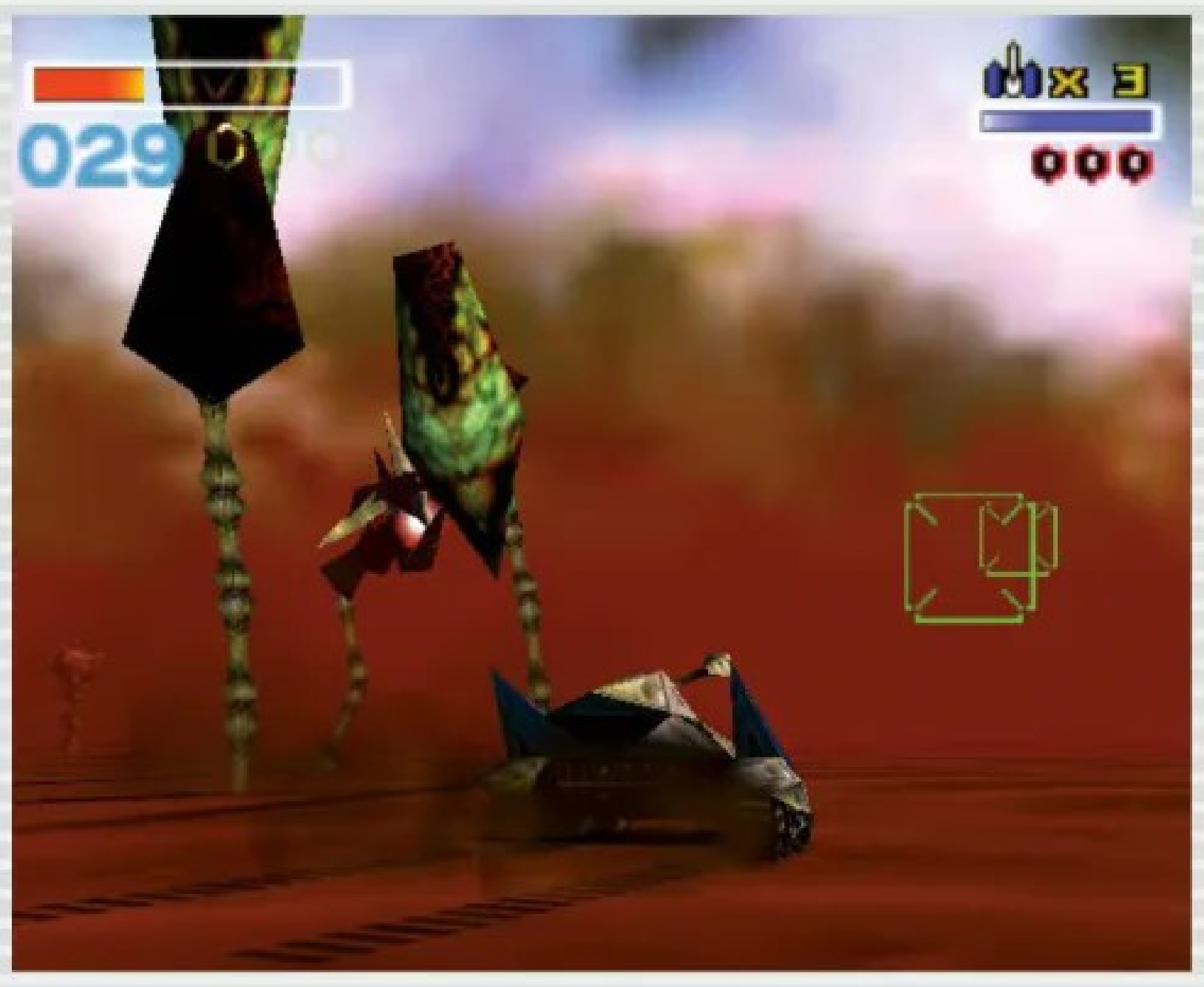


Save the defence post in Fortuna and your reward is a detour to the clement planet Solar.



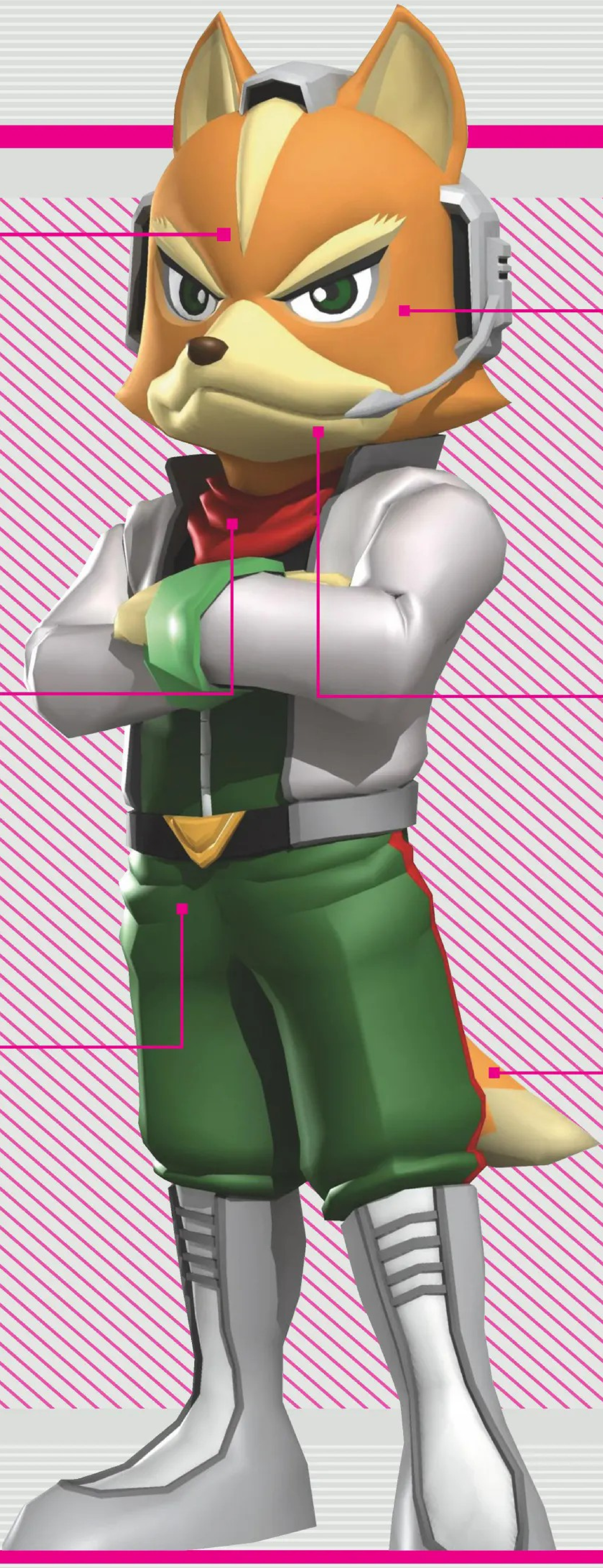
I will terminate all enemies.

Sent to investigate Andross's secret weapon in Sector X, the team find an eerie stretch of space.



In a boss fight, Slippy plummets toward planet Titania. Fox embarks on a rescue mission.

FOX MCCLOUD



BRAIN

Apparently Fox shares the same brain as Miyamoto. No seriously. When deciding on what characteristics he should try to instil in his hero, Miyamoto eventually settled on using himself as a muse. Neat story: yep. Act of self-loving: probably.

FACE

While there is a strong case that all foxes tend to look the same, it's believed that Miyamoto used the face of the Inari statue to map Fox's facial features.

SCARF

Fox's iconic red scarf might seem like a throwaway fashion accessory, but it was inspired by the red scarf seen on the Inari Statue. Actually, to be fair, it was probably slightly throwaway as it was later dropped in *Star Fox Adventures*.

MOUTH

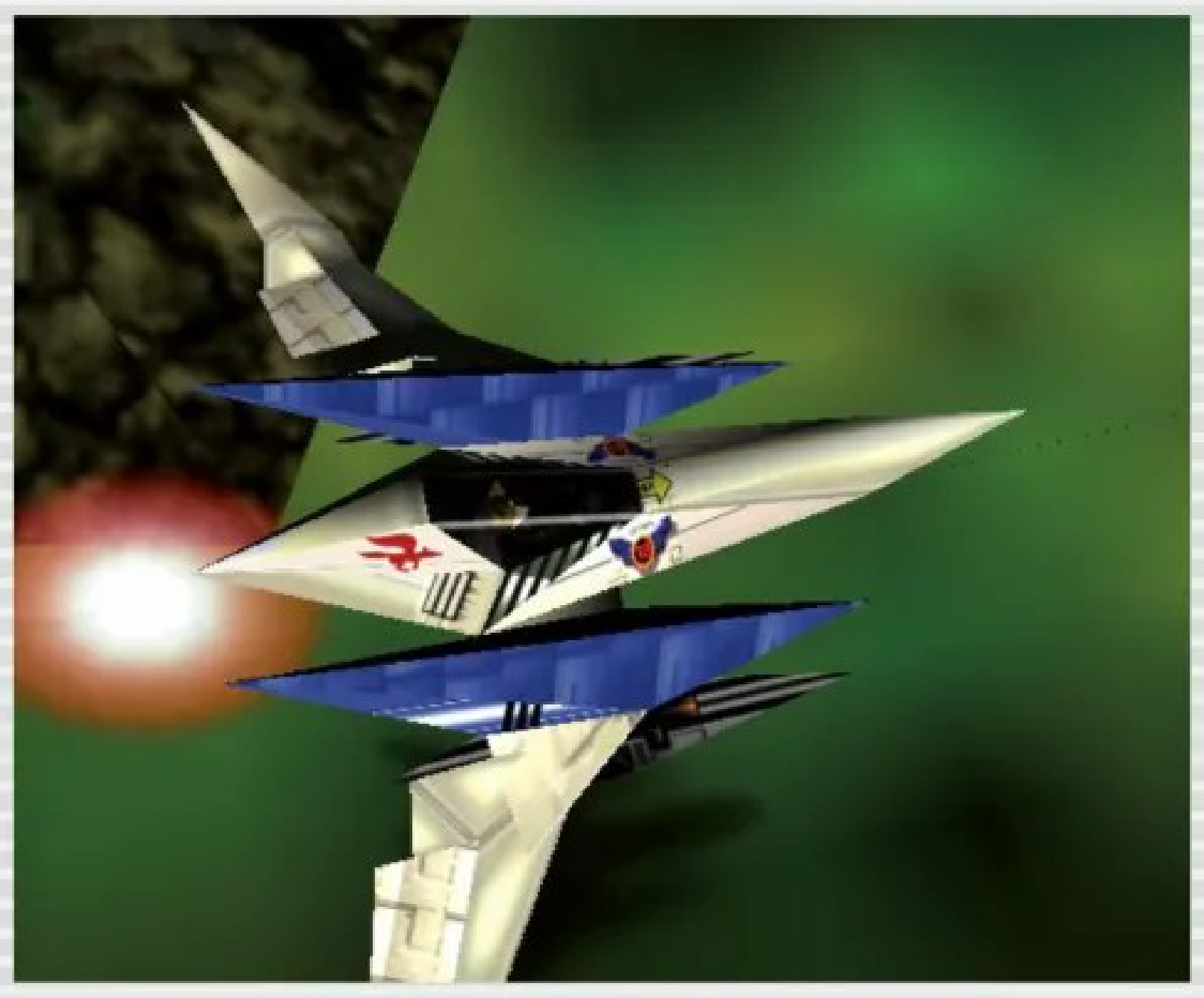
While we didn't get to hear the voices of the Star Fox team until the release of *Star Fox 64*, Fox's voice – courtesy of the vocal chords of Mike West – has a similar resonance to that of a young Luke Skywalker. Unless you switch the audio to the gibberish Lylatian speech, of course.

BODY

Fox's attire has been tweaked for every new *Star Fox* game. In the original, he wears an orange jumpsuit and a silver flight jacket. In *Star Fox 64* the jacket stayed but the suit was switched for olive green. In *Star Fox Adventures* the jacket was replaced with a green sleeveless vest, and from *Star Fox Assault* onward he reverted back to the original green suit-and-jacket combo.

TAIL

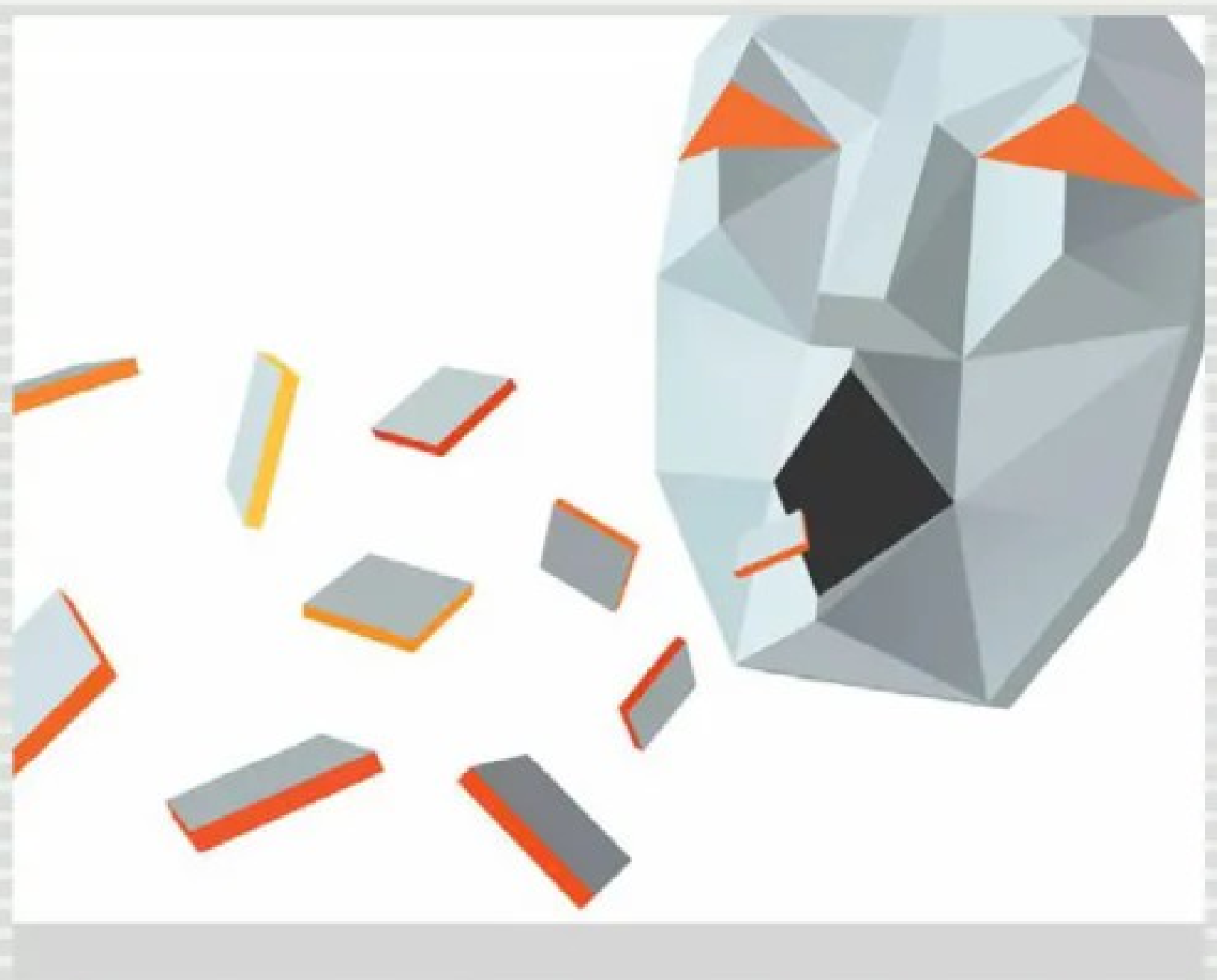
Japanese folklore believes that the more tails a fox has the more spiritual and powerful they are (case in point: Tail's has two and can fly). Anyway, although we now know it's not the size that counts, Fox is oddly still blessed with quite a tiny tail.



Star Fox 64's All Range mode let the team travel in any direction within a cordoned-off area.

PIGMA
Peppy! Long time no see!

Star Wolf's first entrance makes for some interesting chit-chat between Peppy and Pigma.



Fox confronts Andross on Venom. It is one of the finest final boss fights on SNES.

Does the void inside the Asteroid Field here hold the true whereabouts of Fox's father?

STAR FOX CHARACTERS

CHARACTER
R.O.B.64
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX 64
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"FALCO'S SHIP IS UNDER MAINTENANCE" "GREAT. FOX IS READY TO GO" "A BOMB HAD BEEN PLANTED AT THE BASE"
ANIMAL
ER... ROBOT?

■ Working closely with Peppy, R.O.B.64 is the bipedal operator droid for the team's giant mothership, The Great Fox. His main role is to operate and maintain The Great Fox while the team concentrate on their mission. During the game, R.O.B aids the team with information and supplies vehicles and power-ups to the team. It's likely that his name and look is derived from the Robotic Operating Buddy that came bundled with the NES.

CHARACTER
ANDROSS
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"YOU KNOW THAT I CONTROL THE GALAXY. IT'S FOOLISH TO COME AGAINST ME. YOU WILL DIE JUST LIKE YOUR FATHER."
ANIMAL
MONKEY/ROBOT

■ Fox's nemesis, Andross was a scientist in the Cornerian Army before his lust for power drove him mad. He unleashed a deadly weapon on Corneria, and was banished to Venom. Five years later, James McCloud and team were sent to investigate the exiled scientist's status. James and Peppy, betrayed by Pigma, learn that Andross has an army and plans to take over the Lylat System. Andross kills James, but Peppy lives to tell Fox of James's fate and Andross's plans. He usually takes the form of a giant face with hands, and attacks using powerful telekinesis.

CHARACTER
PEPPY HARE
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"DO A BARREL ROLL" "YOU'RE BECOMING MORE LIKE YOUR FATHER" "I SAW MY LIFE FLASH BEFORE MY EYES" "YOUR FATHER HELPED ME LIKE THAT TOO"
ANIMAL
HARE

■ Serving alongside Fox's father, Peppy is the longest-serving member of Star Fox. As well as his experience in piloting and navigation, Peppy also offers the team wisdom. It's clear Fox has reverence for his floppy-eared copilot. Taking a young, wet-eared Fox under his wing, Peppy become his mentor. During the game, he can often be heard giving words of encouragement to Fox over the com-channel. If Peppy were a *Star Wars* character he'd be Obi Wan Kenobi. Except he doesn't die...

CHARACTER
KRYSTAL
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX ADVENTURES
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"ALL RIGHT. HIT 'EM HARD AND DON'T HOLD BACK" "ALL RIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH, BOYS" "DON'T LET US DOWN, FOX" "HUMPH, IT LOOKS LIKE THE GANG'S ALL HERE"
ANIMAL
CAT

■ Krystal was created to play the protagonist in N64's *Dinosaur Planet* before the game was changed to *Star Fox Adventures* on GameCube. Krystal is the sole survivor after her planet is destroyed by an unknown force. She embarks on a quest to find who was responsible, but receives a distress call from the planet Sauria and travels to the Lylat System to learn that an evil general known as Scales has put the safety of the planet into jeopardy. She agrees to help but is soon caught by Scales. Fox comes to her aid but in doing so the pair unwittingly resurrect Andross. After defeating Andross, Fox makes Krystal a member of Star Fox and the couple become romantically linked. How sweet.

CHARACTER
GENERAL PEPPER
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"STAR FOX, WE NEED YOUR HELP" "STAR FOX, WE ARE IN YOUR DEBT"
ANIMAL
DOG

■ General Pepper clearly resembles a dog. There's some debate surrounding his breed; we think he resembles a bloodhound. Pepper is Star Fox's link to the Cornerian Army, and can be seen barking orders and giving Fox his mission briefings. Fox often goes against Pepper's orders, putting instinct ahead of protocol. After *Star Fox Adventures*, Pepper grows seriously ill and hands control of the Cornerian Army over to his friend Peppy Hare. Incidentally, speculation leads us to believe that Pepper may actually be based on The Beatles' Sgt Pepper. The way the band dress on the cover and song titles such as When I'm 64 and With A little Help From My Friends relate to the tone of the game.

CHARACTER
WOLF O'DONNELL
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX 64
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT, STAR FOX" "YOU'LL BE SEEING YOUR DAD SOON, FOX" "PLAY TIME IS OVER, STAR FOX" "DON'T HESITATE, YOU GOTTA DO IT, FOX"
ANIMAL
WOLF

■ Like Fox, Wolf was a member of the Cornerian Army before leaving to lead Star Wolf, an opposing squadron established by Andross to eradicate Star Fox. Wolf is portrayed as Fox's nefarious equal and their rivalry is thought to chart back to their training in the Cornerian Flight Academy. Wolf is depicted as a suave and well-spoken pirate type. In later games his villainy is softened when he boots Pigma out of Star Wolf and comes to Fox's rescue.

CHARACTER
SLIPPY TOAD
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"ENEMY SHIELD ANALYSED" "YIPPEE, YOU DID IT" "THIS IS REALLY STARTING TO TICK ME OFF" "YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME?"
ANIMAL
TOAD

■ Like Falco, Slippy is a long-time friend of Fox. Often mistaken as a girl by fans, owing to his squeaky voice, Slippy Toad is the youngest member of the Star Fox team, serving as the mechanic. His technical skills were passed down from his father, Beltino Toad, who is the research director for the Cornerian Air Force. Because Slippy is always portrayed as the young, inexperienced member of the team, he can often be seen trying to prove his worth and skills during battle. Unfortunately, his inexperience tends to drop him in hot water, frequently requesting help from his team-mates, and in *Star Fox 64* his eagerness to please tends to jeopardise the whole mission.

CHARACTER
PIGMA DENGAR
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX 64
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"DADDY SCREAMED REAL GOOD BEFORE HE DIED" "TOO BAD DADDY'S NOT HERE TO SEE YA FAIL" "PEPPY, LONG TIME NO SEE"
ANIMAL:
PIG

■ Pigma betrayed Star Fox by leading them to Andross, and later joins Star Wolf. Due to his dodgy nature, he is exiled from Star Wolf. In *Star Fox Command*, after fusing with an Aparoid spacecraft, Pigma becomes a machine and is destroyed by Star Fox and presumed dead. He resurfaces as a boss and is finally destroyed. His surname, Dengar, is also the name of a bounty hunter in *The Empire Strikes Back*, but according to Miyamoto it is a Japanese joke referring to the way people from the Kansai region end their sentences. So now you know.

CHARACTER
FALCO LOMBARDI
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"I CAN'T SHAKE THIS GUY" "SCRATCH ONE BOGEY" "YOU'RE DEAD MEAT, PAL" "HEY, EINSTEIN, I'M ON YOUR SIDE"
ANIMAL:
FALCON

■ Falco is the hot-headed and ably skilled Arwing pilot whose temper and reckless nature almost saw him thrown out of the Cornerian Air Force. He is Fox's closest friend and is often referred to as his sidekick. Although dependable, he often shows disdain for Fox's position as leader, occasionally trying to undermine his captain in battle. Falco's impulsiveness saw him leave Star Fox for a brief period during the plot of *Star Fox Adventures*, but he does return at the end, Han Solo-style, to rescue Fox and help defeat Andross.

CHARACTER
BILL GREY
FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR FOX 64
MEMORABLE QUOTES
"JUST LIKE OLD TIMES, HUH, FOX" "I'M GLAD WE'RE ON THE SAME TEAM, FOX"
ANIMAL
DOG

■ Bill is a friend from Fox's training days in the Academy. But while Fox dropped out of the services to resurrect Star Fox, Bill continued his training and went on to become a crack pilot in the Cornerian Army. Bill was later given command of the Husky and Bulldog squadrons and leads them to battle in Lylat Wars where he comes to the aid of Fox and his team in Katina and Solar (depending on the route you take), and in the Anglar Invasion chronicled in *Star Fox Command*. To continue the *Star Wars* analogy, Bill is the equivalent of Luke Skywalker's ill-fated copilot, Biggs Darklighter. Oh dear…

SUPERFROG

Nintendo had Mario and Sega had Sonic. But what did Commodore have? We make a case for Superfrog, the Amiga's greatest hero

ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** SUPER FROG
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** SUPER FROG
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER FROG HD
- **» FINEST HOUR:** SUPER FROG
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** JUMPING

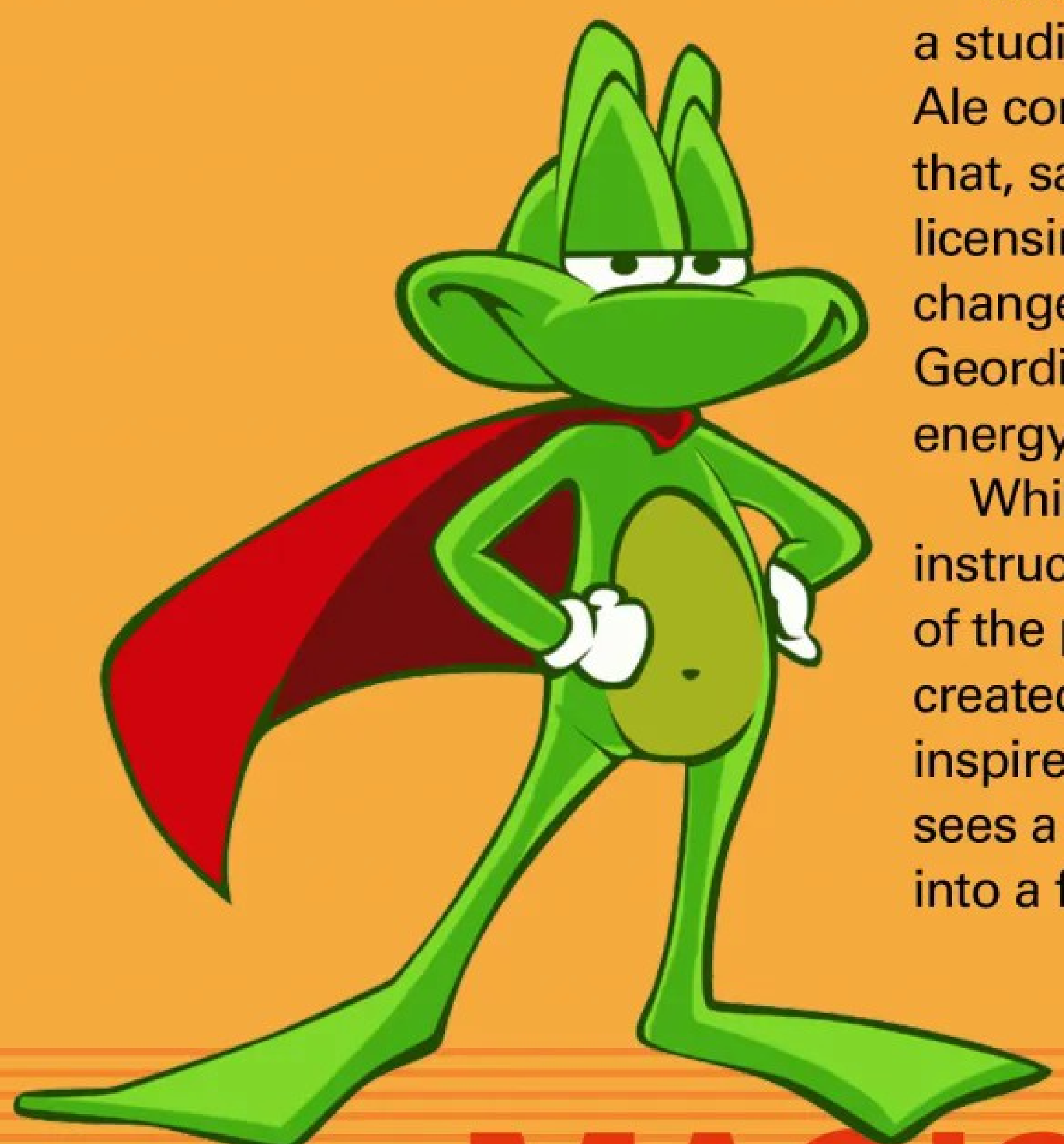
Gaming in the early Nineties was largely about mascots. If your console of choice didn't have one then you just couldn't attract mainstream appeal. The SNES and Mega Drive became household names thanks to Mario and Sonic, but where did this leave the home computers, without a first-party publisher to create something similar?

The result, rather ironically, is that those systems ended up with multiple mascots, as third-party developers lined up to create the next big character. Commodore's Amiga had its fair share with the likes of Zool and James Pond, but the best of all was arguably Superfrog.

Brainstormed through the doodles of *Alien Breed* artist Rico Holmes, Superfrog was originally named Chuck, presumably because of his sidekick, Spud, a little green blob that could be thrown at enemies. As the design progressed, Spud remained but Chuck was renamed Superfrog by Team17 head Martyn Brown. In a typically British twist, it was decided that Superfrog would find his powers by drinking Newcastle Brown Ale and would gain a Geordie accent too.

With Team17 well known throughout the games industry as a studio that liked to have a drink or two, the Newcastle Brown Ale connection was hardly surprising. But it was a connection that, sadly, didn't make it into the final game. After securing a licensing deal with Beecham, Superfrog's drink of choice was changed to the much more family-friendly Lucozade and the Geordie accent was dropped, despite the fact that the fizzy energy drink was first created in Newcastle.

While the origin stories of most game characters were told in instruction manuals at the time, *Superfrog* was slightly ahead of the pack thanks to a hand-painted introductory cinematic, created by popular Amiga animator Eric Schwartz. Partly inspired by The Frog Prince and The Wizard Of Oz, the story sees a princess kidnapped by an evil witch, her prince turned into a frog and left alone at the River Of Despair. Just when he seems to have become resigned to his fate, the frog prince spots a bottle of Lucozade floating lazily down the river, pulls it out it, necks the syrupy orange liquid and unexpectedly transforms into Superfrog before impulsively flying off to rescue his betrothed.



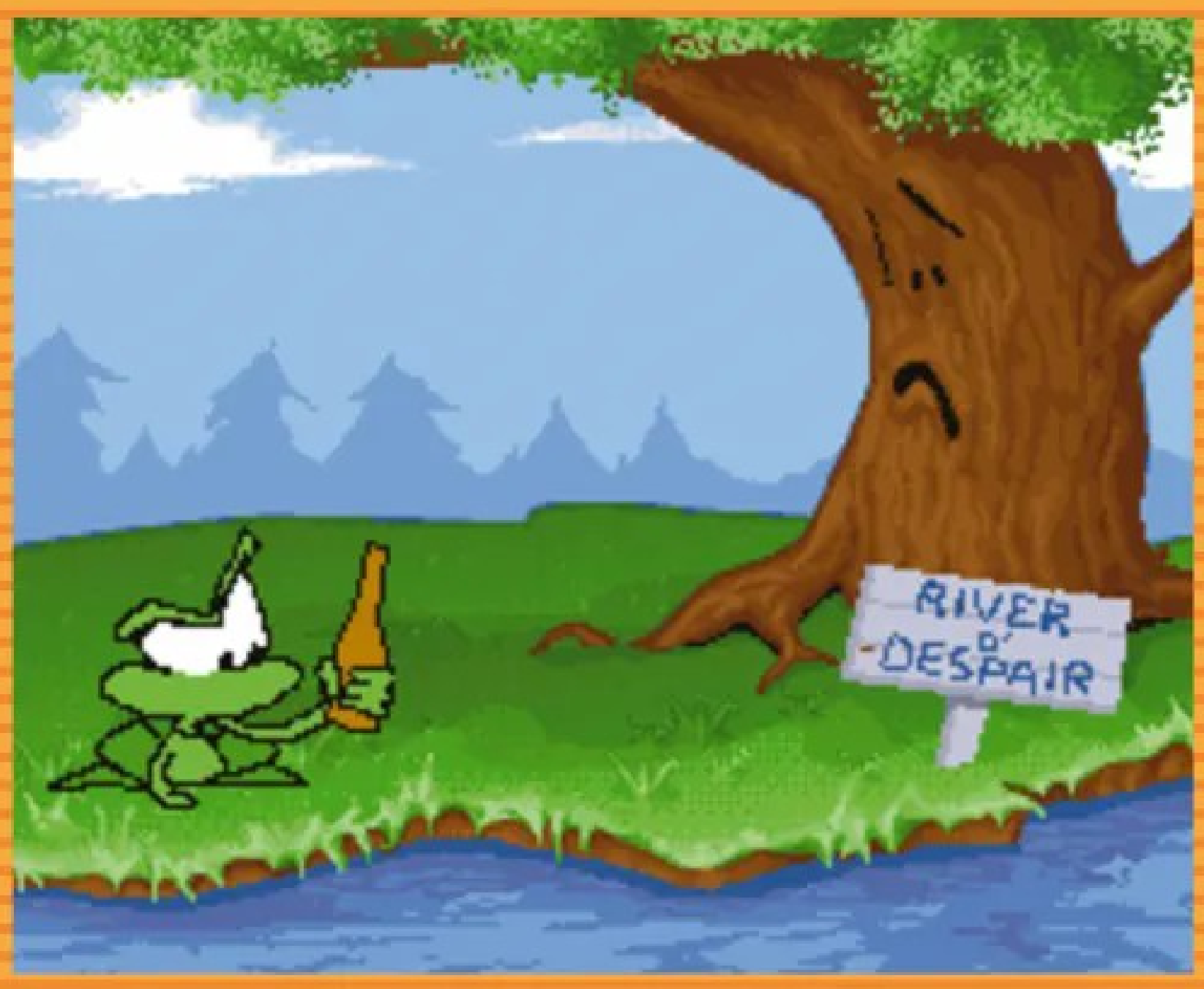
The game itself was one of the better platform games on the Amiga. Loosely comparable to *Sonic The Hedgehog*, it had enough of its own ideas to stand out from the pack. A wealth of secret areas – and the need to collect coins to open the level exit – made it more of an exploration game than a straight speed-run, and in this respect it had more in common with a Rare title than anything created by Nintendo or Sega. It also had a similar sense of humour, with the Team's self-recorded fart noises providing the sound effect for squished enemies and an inter-level fruit machine mini-game retaining that distinct British feel that had threatened to disappear with Superfrog's distinctive Geordie accent.

> **"Brainstormed through the doodles of Rico Holmes, Superfrog was orginally named Chuck"**

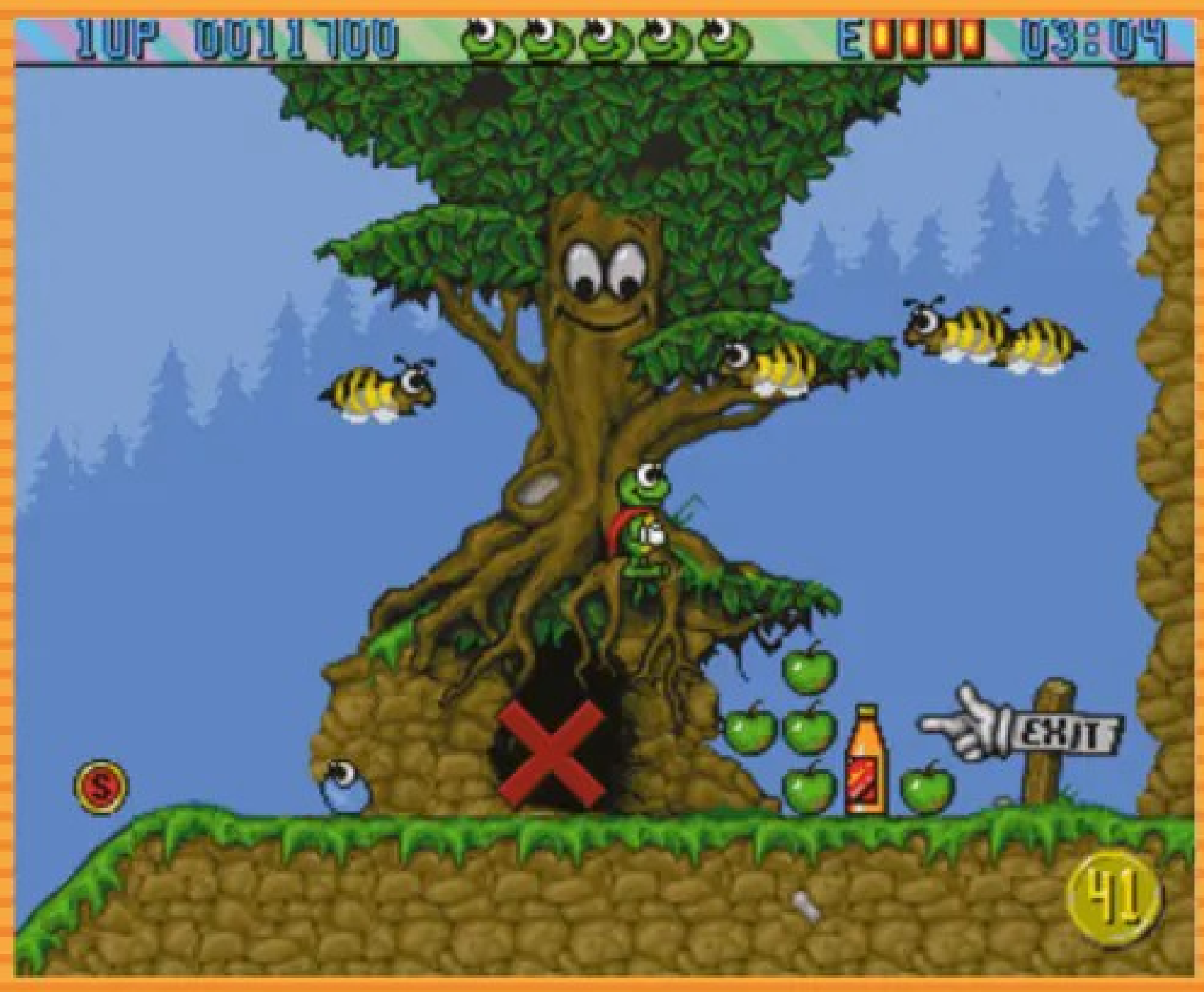
Those who finished *Superfrog* were rewarded with an unexpected ending. Upon rescuing the princess, our amphibious hero receives a kiss, but instead of turning back to a prince his girlfriend transforms into a frog and the game ends, leaving the story open for a sequel.

That follow-up never happened, though. The game itself was popular with both press and gamers and was later ported to both CD32 and PC, but its success was eclipsed by Team17's phenomenally popular *Worms* series. The planned sequel, an isometric adventure called *Frog And Ball*, was cancelled mid-development and all we've received since is a HD remake, suggesting confidence in a *Superfrog* game is no longer there. Don't worry Superfrog, we still love you. *

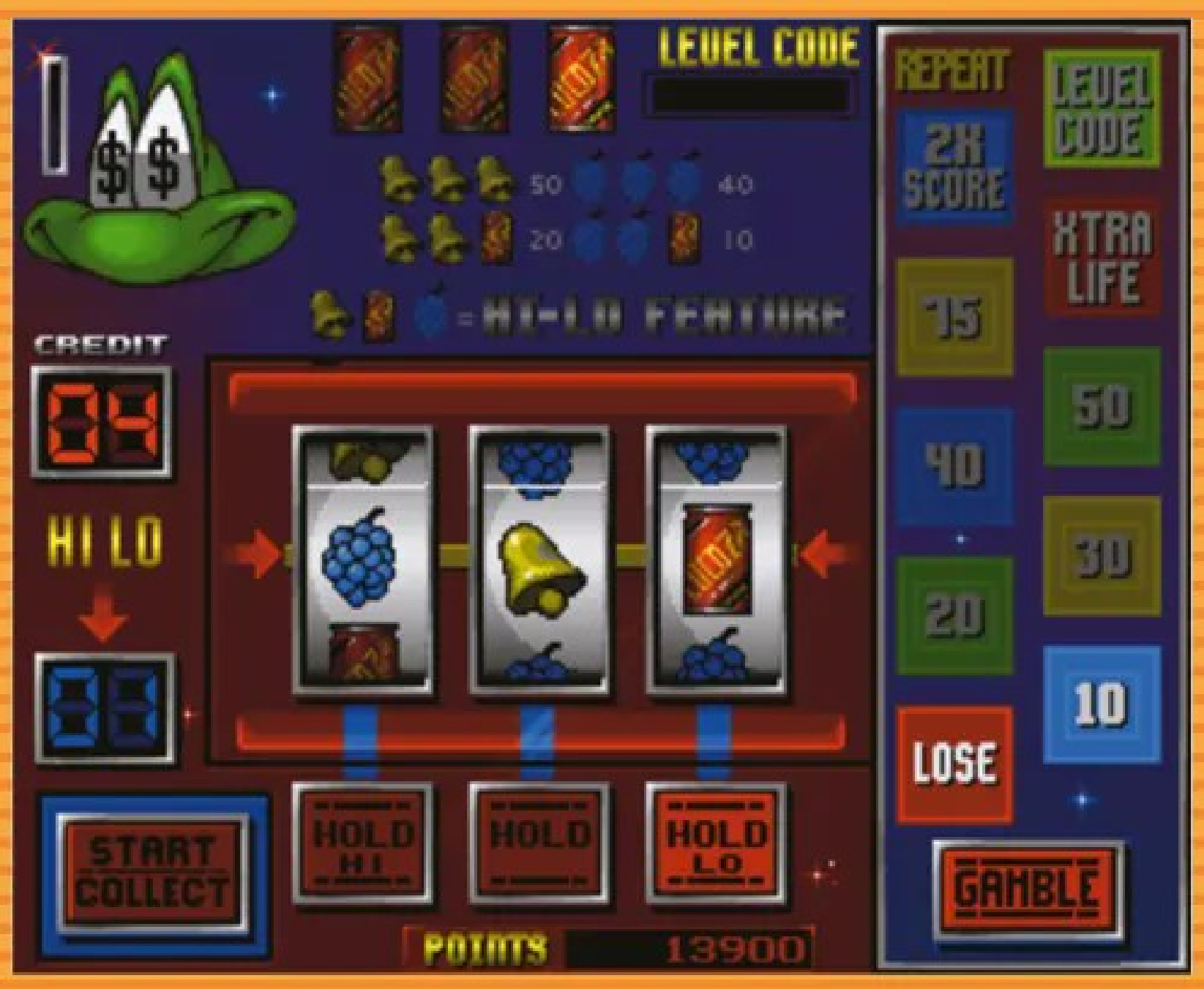
> MAGIC MOMENTS



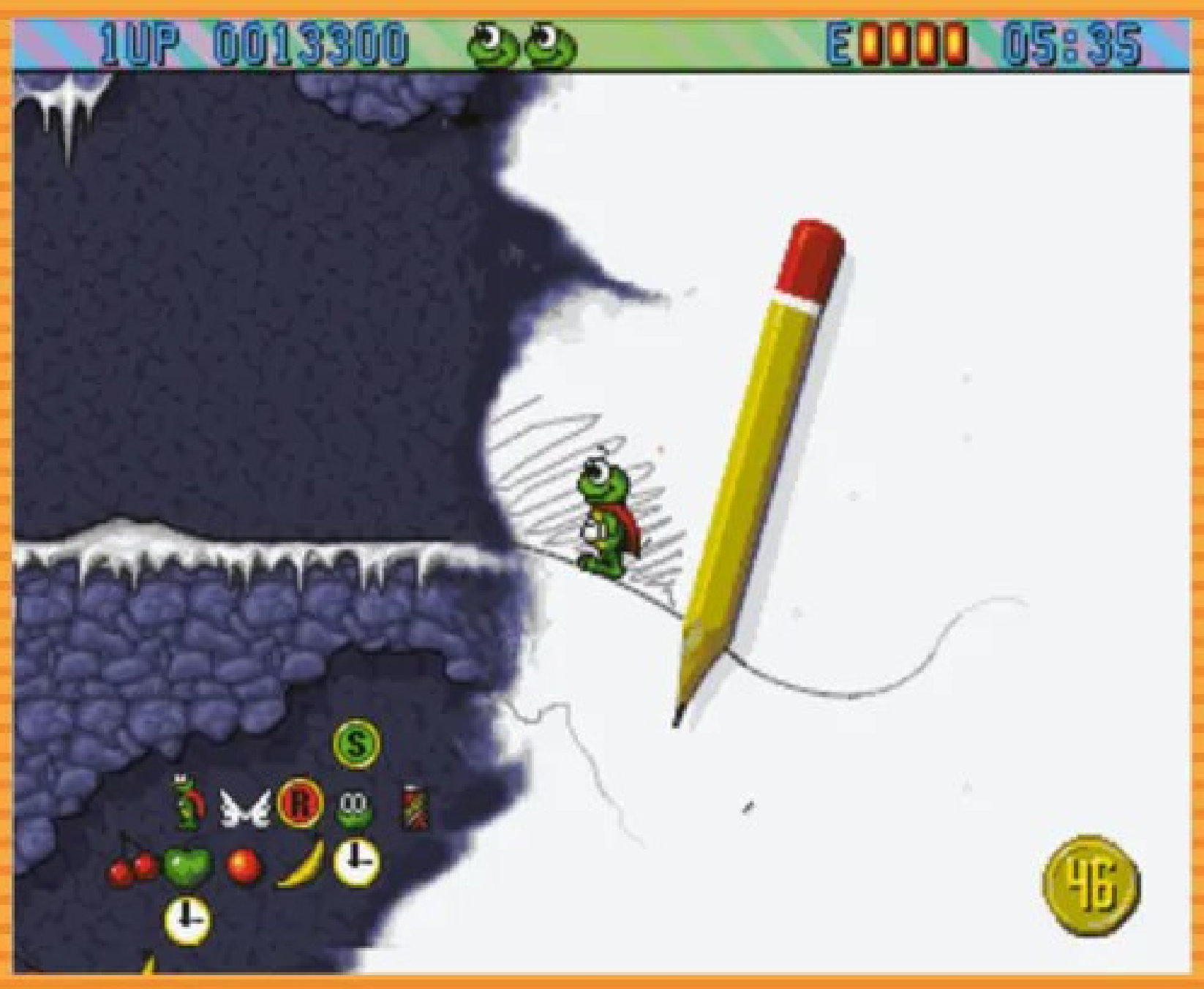
■ The frog prince discovers a lovely bottle of Lucozade floating in the River of Despair.



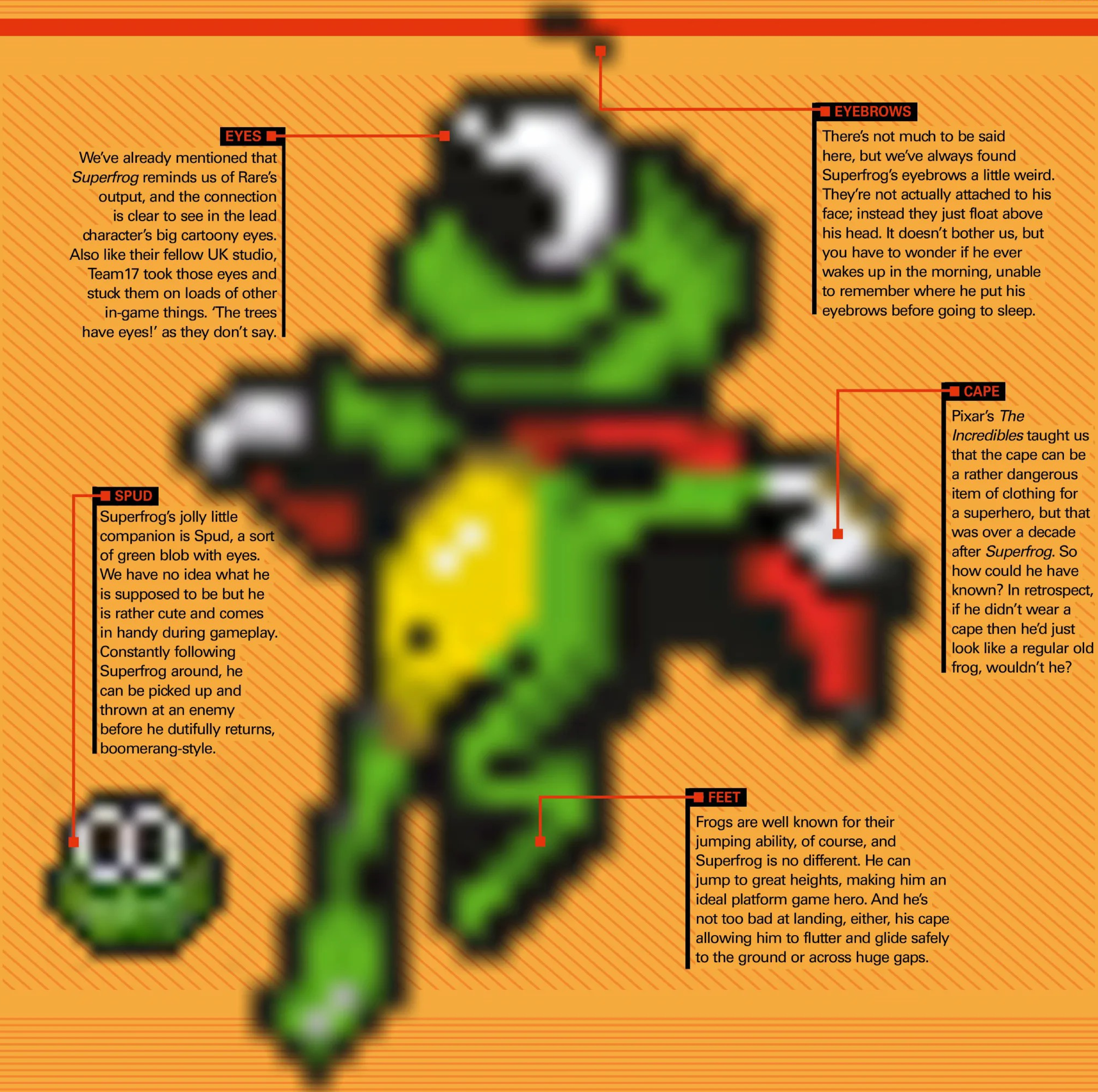
■ The Lucozade occasionally appears in-game. Drink it to replenish health. Just like real life!



■ Superfrog indulges his gambling addiction by playing a fruit machine. Is Lucozade a fruit?



■ A secret area in World 5 reveals an unfinished part of the level. Was Team17 in the pub that day?



EYES

We've already mentioned that *Superfrog* reminds us of Rare's output, and the connection is clear to see in the lead character's big cartoony eyes. Also like their fellow UK studio, Team17 took those eyes and stuck them on loads of other in-game things. 'The trees have eyes!' as they don't say.

EYEBROWS

There's not much to be said here, but we've always found Superfrog's eyebrows a little weird. They're not actually attached to his face; instead they just float above his head. It doesn't bother us, but you have to wonder if he ever wakes up in the morning, unable to remember where he put his eyebrows before going to sleep.

SPUD

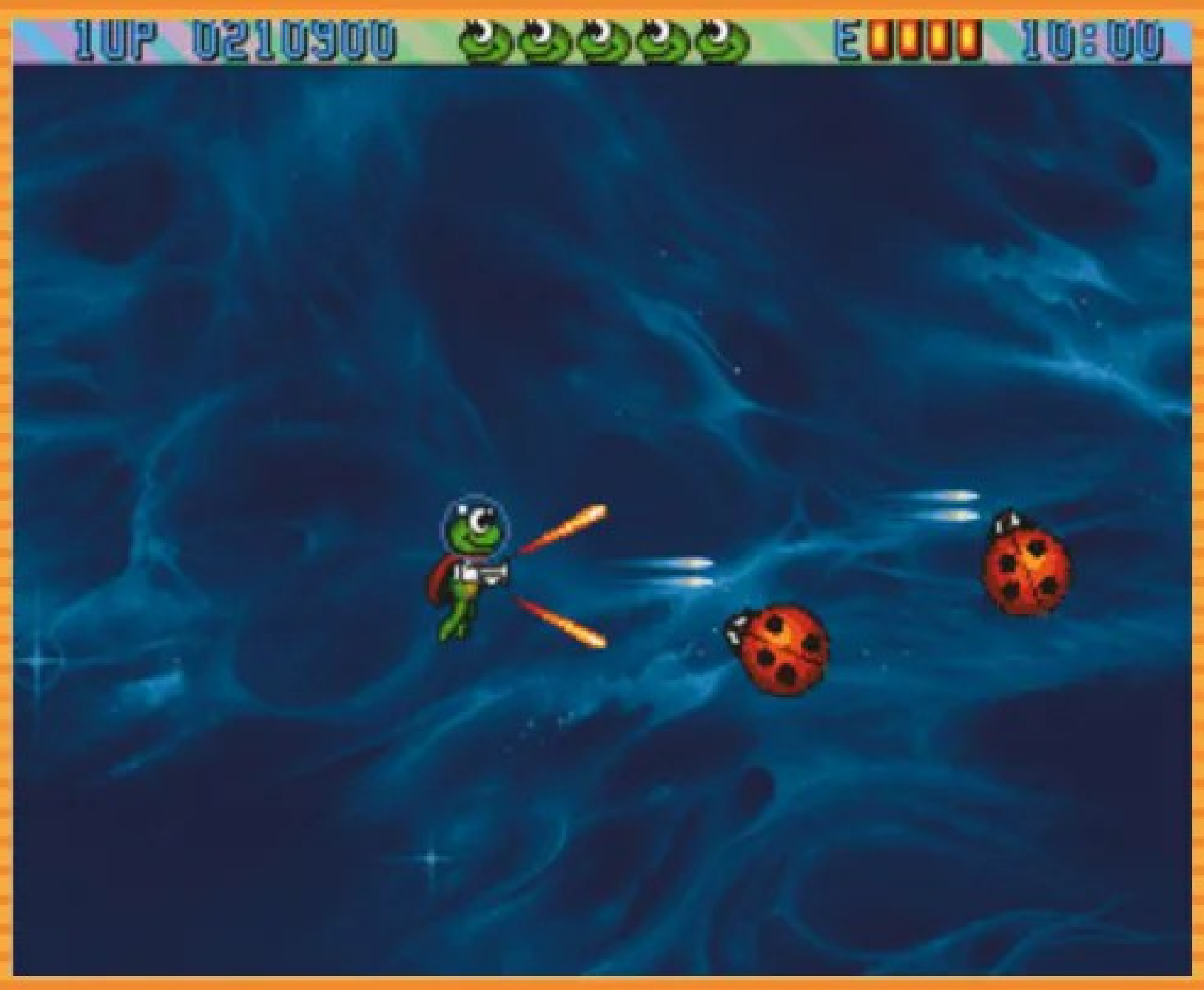
Superfrog's jolly little companion is Spud, a sort of green blob with eyes. We have no idea what he is supposed to be but he is rather cute and comes in handy during gameplay. Constantly following Superfrog around, he can be picked up and thrown at an enemy before he dutifully returns, boomerang-style.

CAPE

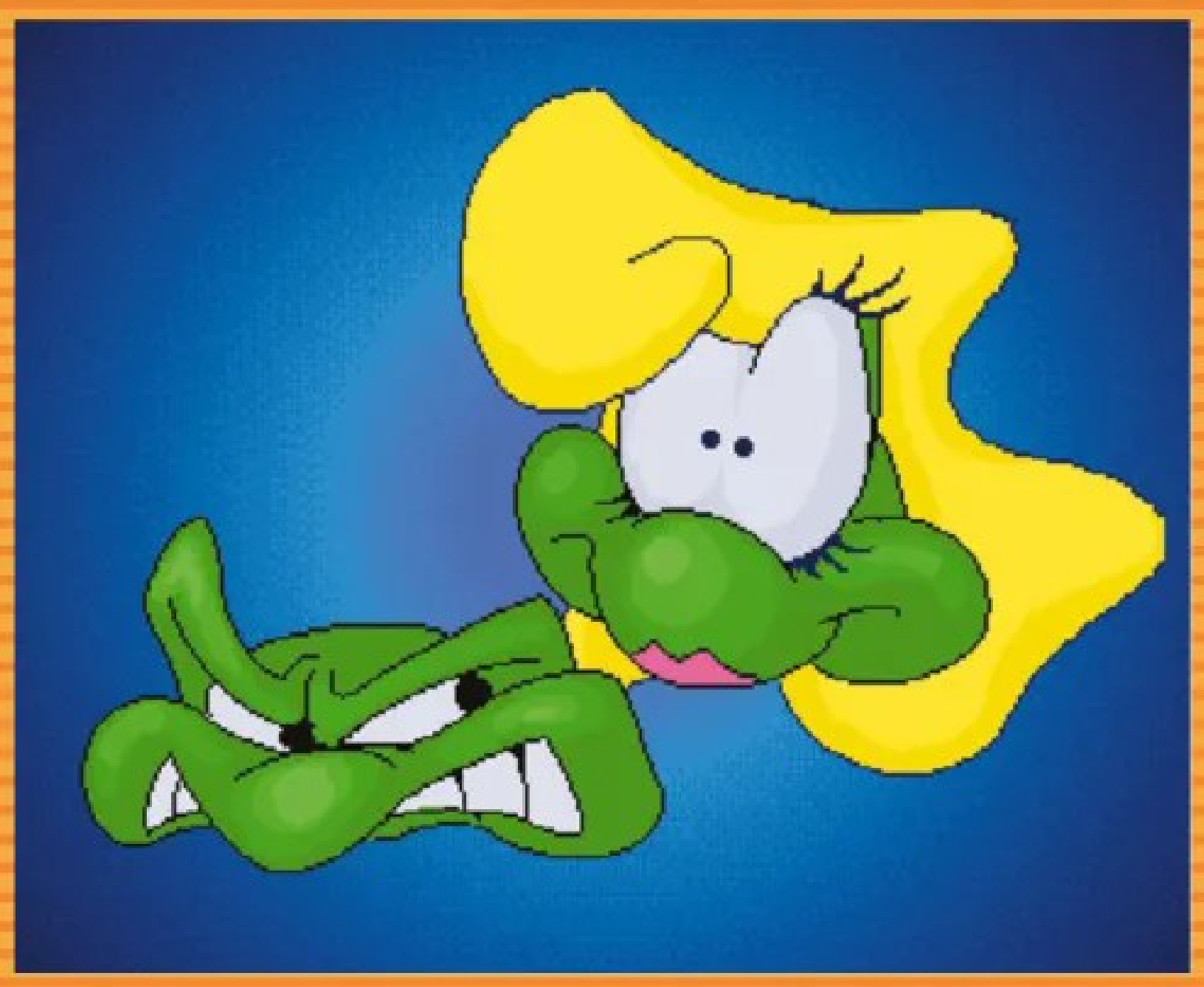
Pixar's *The Incredibles* taught us that the cape can be a rather dangerous item of clothing for a superhero, but that was over a decade after *Superfrog*. So how could he have known? In retrospect, if he didn't wear a cape then he'd just look like a regular old frog, wouldn't he?

FEET

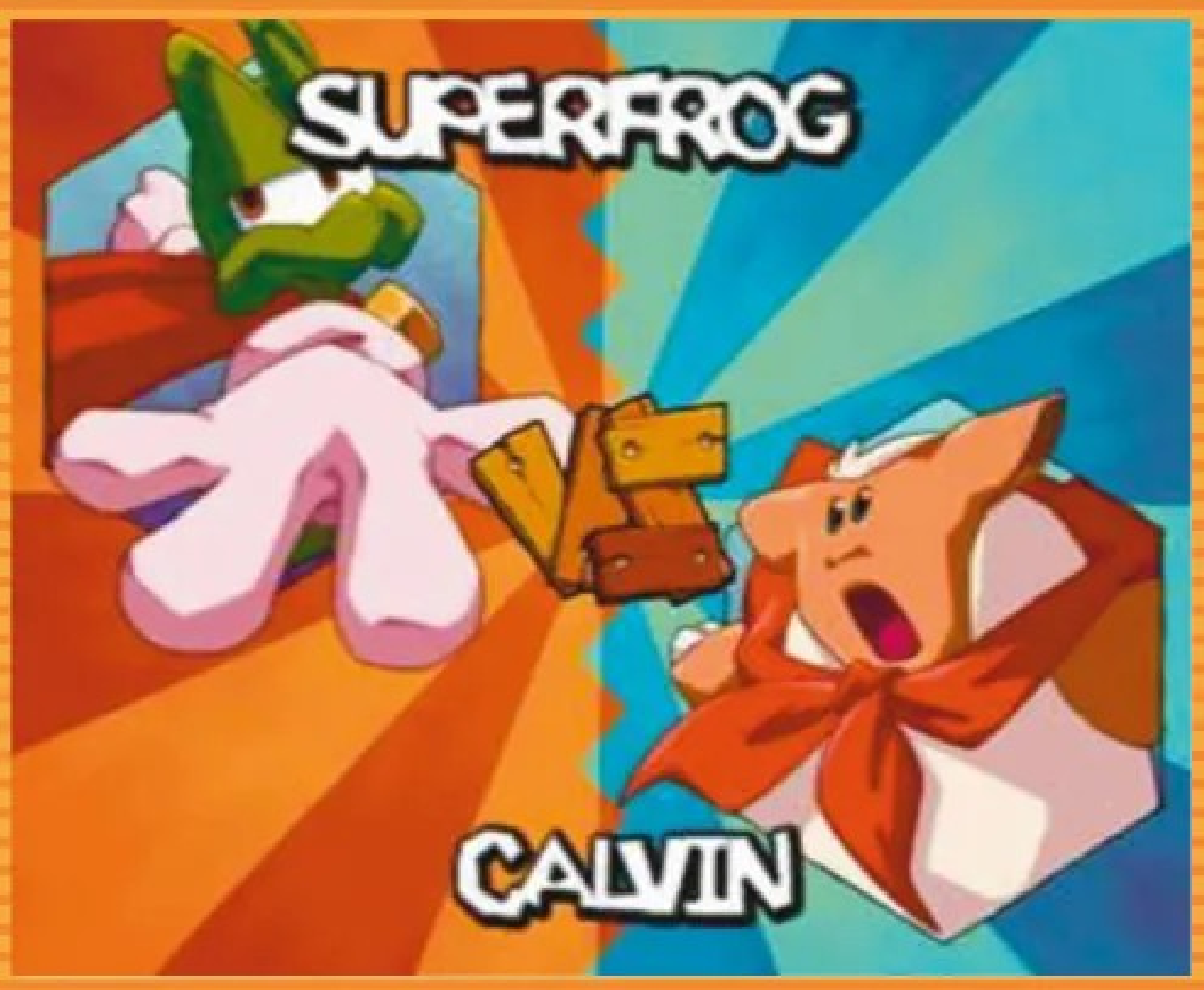
Frogs are well known for their jumping ability, of course, and Superfrog is no different. He can jump to great heights, making him an ideal platform game hero. And he's not too bad at landing, either, his cape allowing him to flutter and glide safely to the ground or across huge gaps.



■ One of the last levels, called Project F, is a fun homage to previous Team 17 title *Project X*.



■ *Superfrog*'s ending sees the princess turned into a frog. Our hero isn't too happy about it.

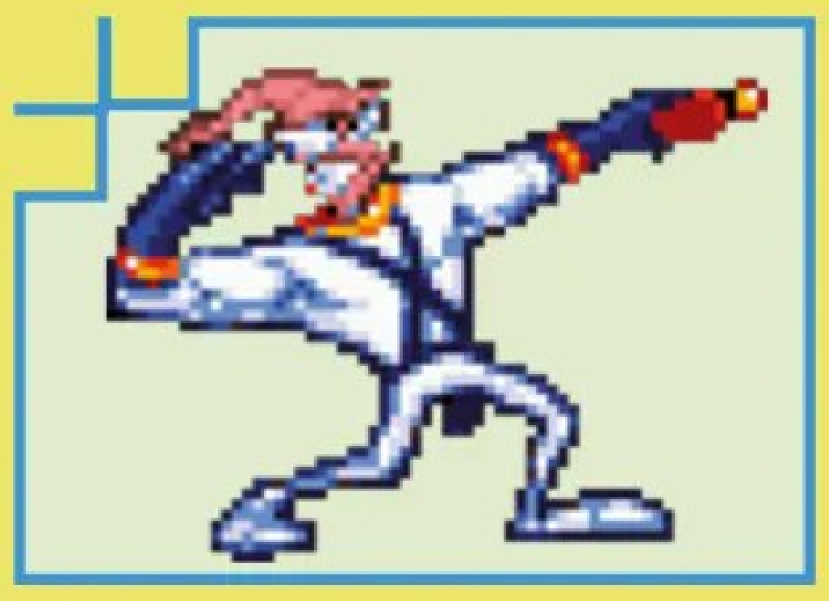


■ Superfrog appears as a secret playable character in puzzle game Worms Blast.

■ A reward animation in *Worms 3D* sees a Worm turn into Superfrog after being struck by lightning.

EARTHWORM JIM

We look back at the groovy super-powered annelid who wormed his way to 16-bit stardom



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** EARTHWORM JIM
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** EARTHWORM JIM
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** EARTHWORM JIM HD
- » **FINEST HOUR:** EARTHWORM JIM
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** WEARING A SUPER SUIT

Platform game characters are ten a penny and only the genuinely great ones have gone on to endure. In fact, you can count on one hand the notable and lasting platform characters that emerged from the 16-bit era. *Earthworm Jim*'s arrival on Mega Drive, however, caused quite a stir back in 1994. It was a wonderful mix of run-and-gun meets action/platformer but rife with wit and capricious humour that parodied everything from film to Tex Avery cartoons and other videogames. It was as loud and as brash as games came back then, and kids lapped it up, especially as the central character leading this charge was equally as radical, comical and unique as the game he appeared in.

Designed by Doug TenNapel, the talented animator behind Nickelodeon show Rugrats, and brought to life by Shiny Entertainment founder David Perry, Earthworm Jim was one of the most unusual platform heroes to hit the scene. Shiny's team of artists, programmers and magicians used a nifty animation technique called 'Animotion' on the Mega Drive, achieving some unbelievable technical feats on Sega's 16-bit machine.

For those unfamiliar with *Earthworm Jim*'s story, the manual explains that Jim is just a regular earthworm doing regular earthworm-like things when an 'ultra-high-tech-indestructible-super-space-cyber-suit', built by Professor Monkey For A Head, falls to earth and lands on him, bestowing him with a bunch of cool super powers. It later transpires that the suit was commissioned by an evil queen – with a name so long we can't be bothered to type it – in her bid to conquer the galaxy. Basically, somewhere along the way the suit got lost, fell on a worm, a princess got kidnapped and Jim sets off to rescue her.

Shiny employed some clever tricks to help Jim stand out from his peers. As well as his super-powered suit, he was blessed with a multitude of moves at his disposal, and many saw the character used in a wacky and comical way – be it as a whip to lash out at enemies, swing from environments, or even zip around like copter rotors to ensure a soft landing from lofty ledges. Furthermore, he was armed with a satisfying red hand cannon that acted like an uzi, immediately helping him look a lot cooler than blue hedgehogs or paunchy Italian plumbers.

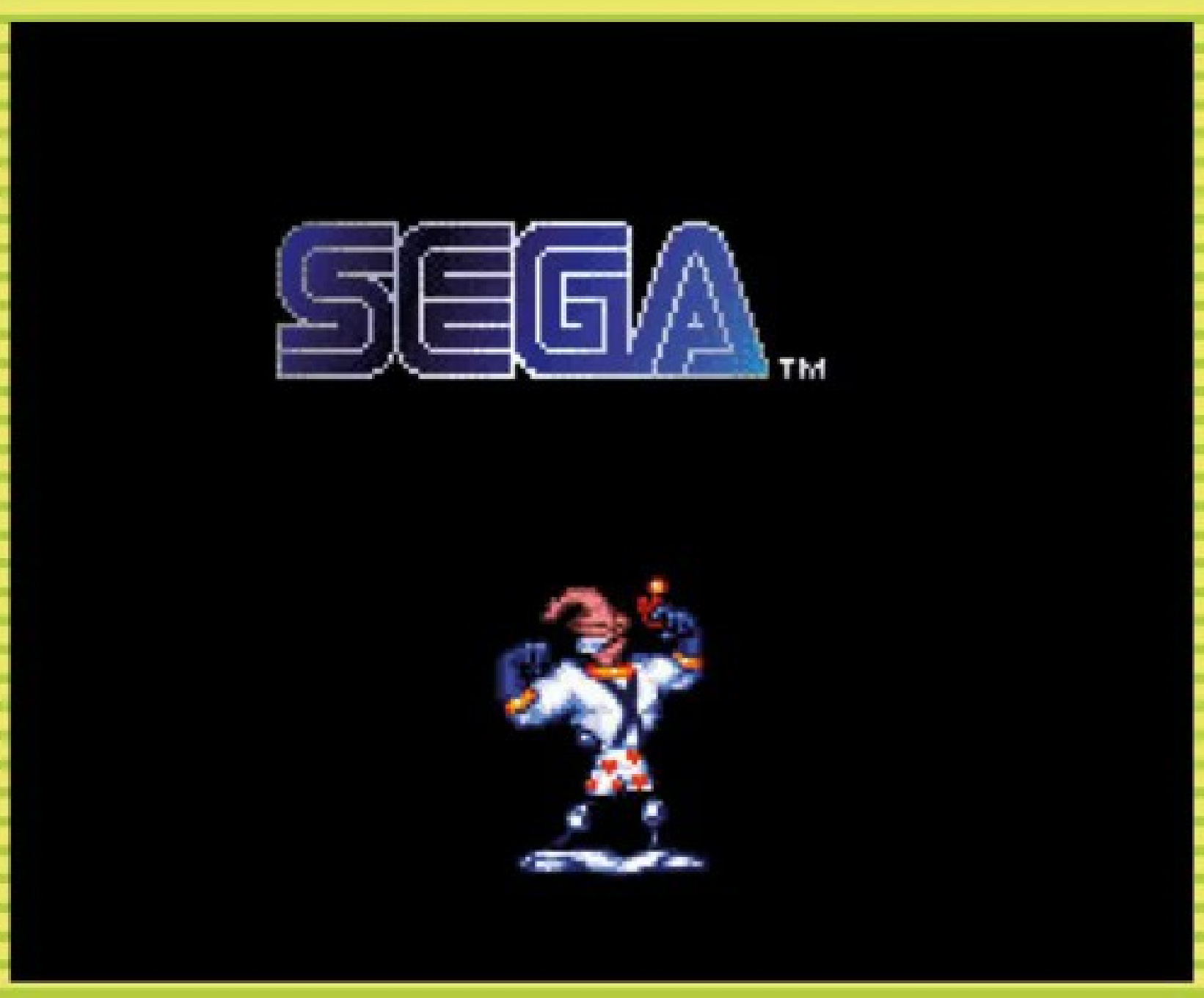
> **“He remains one of the quirkiest and most successful platform characters”**

Following the release of the first game, which gleaned all sorts of awards and accolades, predictably, sequels followed. Perry, TenNapel and Shiny Entertainment all returned for the follow-up, *Earthworm Jim 2*, which, while certainly recapturing the zany spirit of the original, some fans argued wasn't quite as tight as the original with Shiny ramping up the quirkiness by adding a plethora of different gameplay styles and wacky set pieces diluting the excellent run-and-gun action from the first game. The next two *Earthworm Jim* releases were made without Shiny's involvement, these were *Earthworm 3D*, and the Game Boy Color game, *Earthworm Jim 2: Menace To The Galaxy*. The first was an awkward and uninspired transition into 3D for Jim and the latter, which was more in keeping with previous instalments, was based on the popular animated television show when the character at the peak of his popularity.

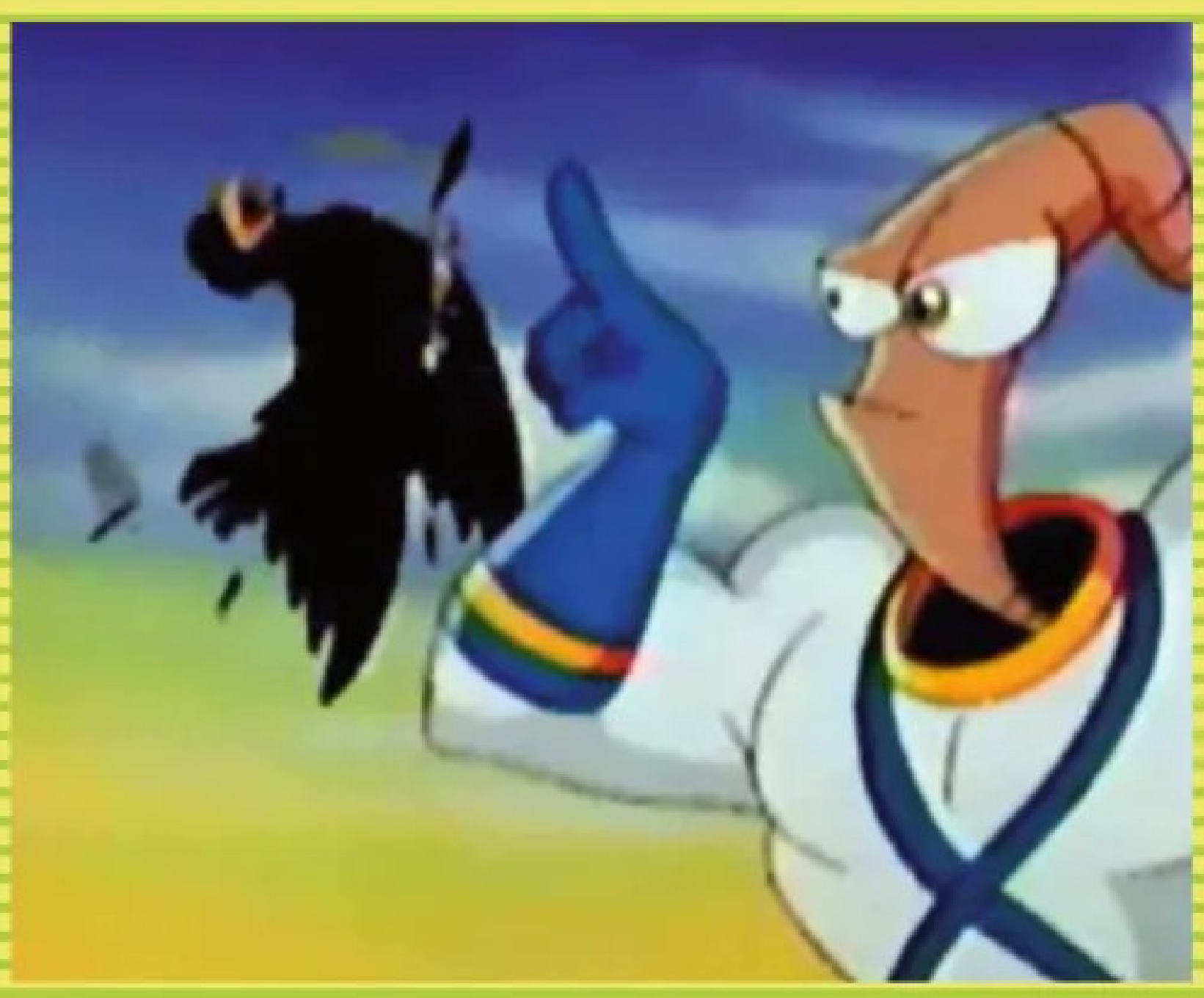
Since then, apart from a few cameos in *ClayFighter 63 1/3* and the PC version of *Battle Arena Toshinden*, things became relatively quiet for Jim who, like regular earthworms, seemed to just spend the next few years with his head in the soil. After a failed attempt by David Perry and Atari a few years back to reunite the original team to create a brand new classic two-dimensional game for the PSP, it seems Jim is finally starting to worm his way back onto the scene. His first 2D platform outing is already available on Nintendo's Virtual Console service with the sequel expected to follow, plus Doug TenNapel and the rest of the team revealed they are making a new game for the Intellivision Amico.

Whatever the future has in store for our old friend Earthworm Jim, one thing is for sure: he remains one of the quirkiest and most successful platform game characters ever to emerge from the West, and could stand shoulder to shoulder – with the aid of his suit, of course – with the cream of Japanese creations. Not too shabby for a modest little earthworm. *

> MAGIC MOMENTS



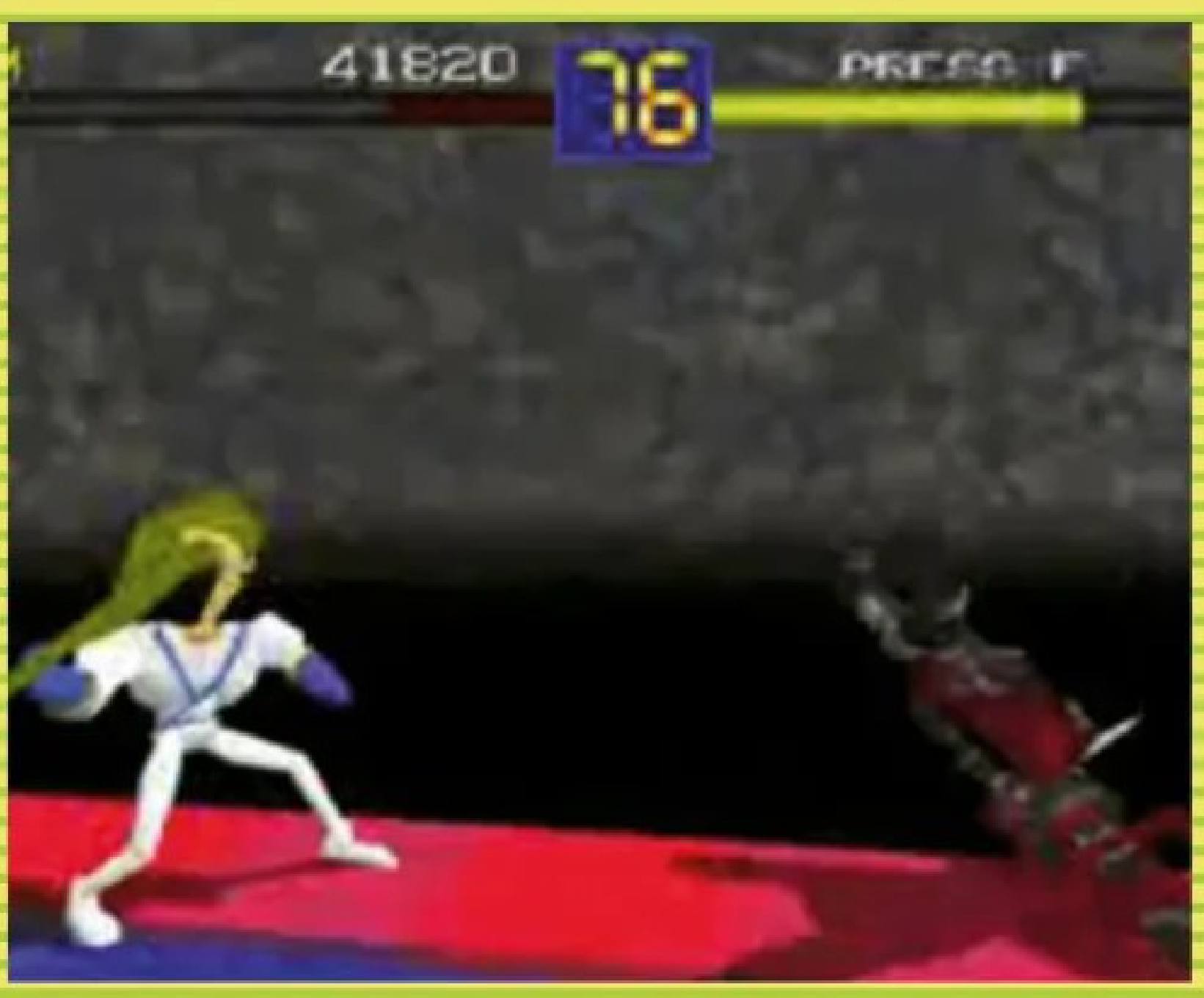
■ We're introduced to Jim and the type of humour rife in the game during Sega's loading screen.



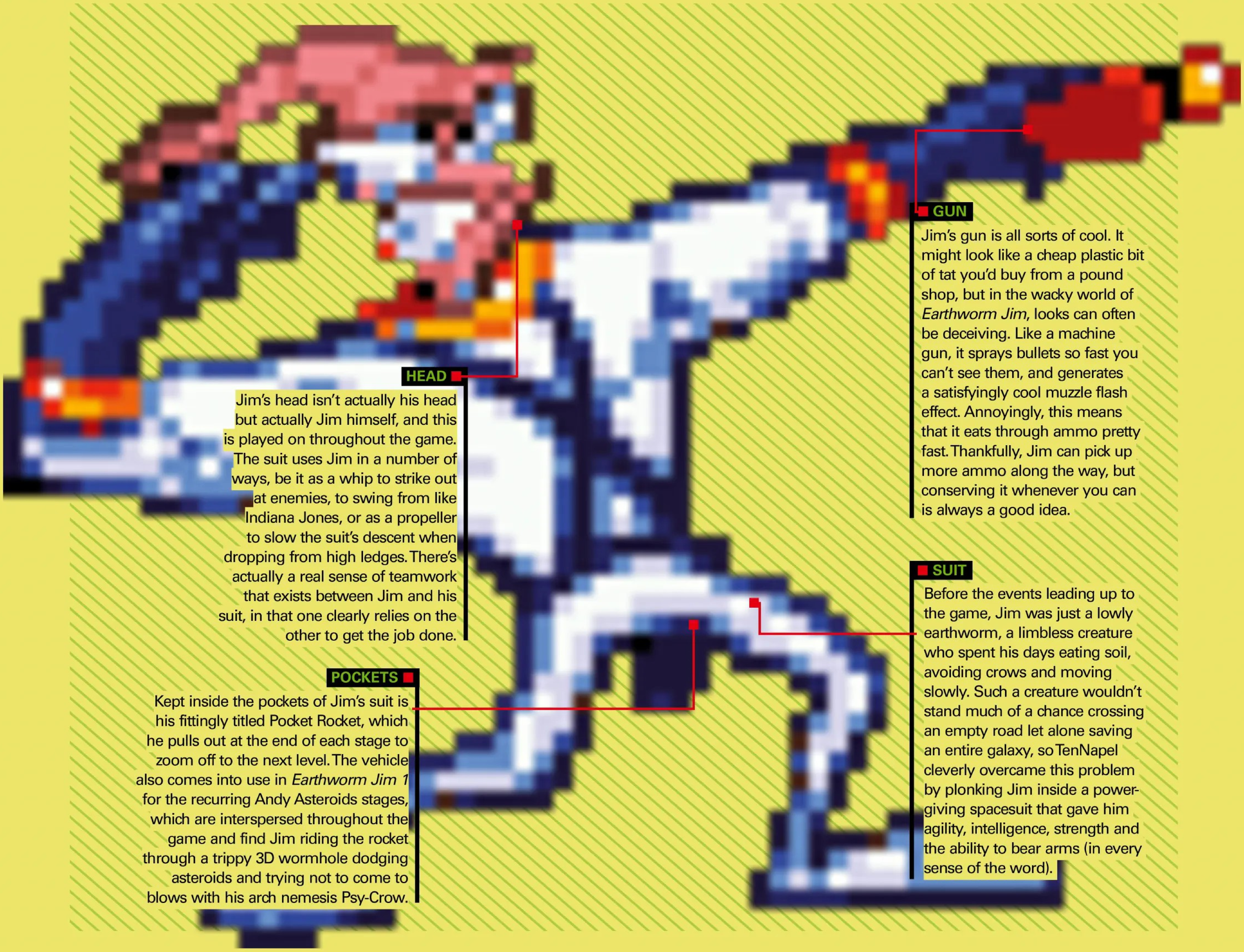
■ Jim got his own TV show, and was voiced by Dan 'Homer Simpson' Castellaneta.

JIM
EAT DIRT!

■ Interplay went all-out with the merchandising, even releasing a popular line of Jim action figures.



■ Due to a deal between Playmates and Takara, Jim popped up in *Battle Arena Toshinden* on PC.



HEAD

Jim's head isn't actually his head but actually Jim himself, and this is played on throughout the game. The suit uses Jim in a number of ways, be it as a whip to strike out at enemies, to swing from like Indiana Jones, or as a propeller to slow the suit's descent when dropping from high ledges. There's actually a real sense of teamwork that exists between Jim and his suit, in that one clearly relies on the other to get the job done.

POCKETS

Kept inside the pockets of Jim's suit is his fittingly titled Pocket Rocket, which he pulls out at the end of each stage to zoom off to the next level. The vehicle also comes into use in *Earthworm Jim 1* for the recurring Andy Asteroids stages, which are interspersed throughout the game and find Jim riding the rocket through a trippy 3D wormhole dodging asteroids and trying not to come to blows with his arch nemesis Psy-Crow.

GUN

Jim's gun is all sorts of cool. It might look like a cheap plastic bit of tat you'd buy from a pound shop, but in the wacky world of *Earthworm Jim*, looks can often be deceiving. Like a machine gun, it sprays bullets so fast you can't see them, and generates a satisfyingly cool muzzle flash effect. Annoyingly, this means that it eats through ammo pretty fast. Thankfully, Jim can pick up more ammo along the way, but conserving it whenever you can is always a good idea.

SUIT

Before the events leading up to the game, Jim was just a lowly earthworm, a limbless creature who spent his days eating soil, avoiding crows and moving slowly. Such a creature wouldn't stand much of a chance crossing an empty road let alone saving an entire galaxy, so TenNapel cleverly overcame this problem by plonking Jim inside a power-giving spacesuit that gave him agility, intelligence, strength and the ability to bear arms (in every sense of the word).

■ Given *Earthworm Jim's* humour it's no surprise that the ending finishes on a comical note.

VS.
IN THE
CANDY FACTORY

■ Jim cameos in the *ClayFighter* series, and is said to have a strong rivalry with Boogerman.

■ If Jim loses all his health you're treated to a comical death scene in which his suit explodes.

■ Many of the bosses in the series are memorable and, like this fire-breathing snowman, bizarre.

SOIL YOURSELF MOMENTS

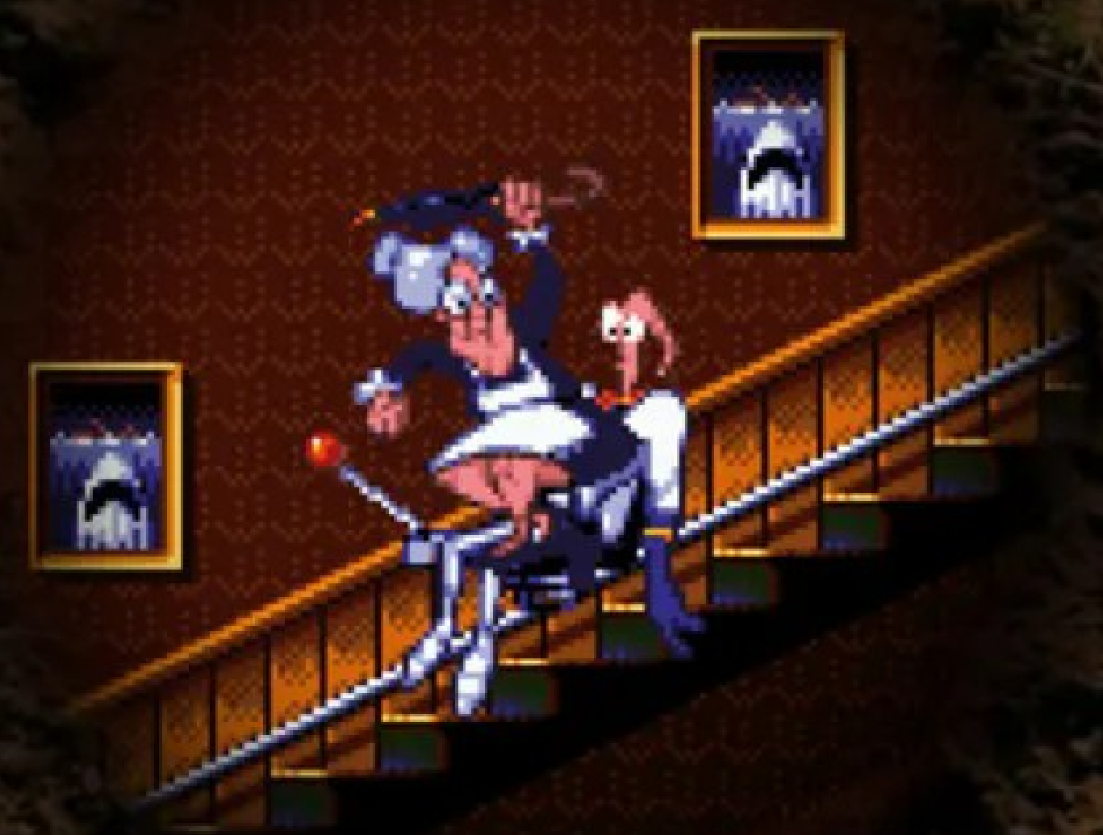
WITH THEIR WONDERFUL LEVEL DESIGN, BIZARRE BOSSES, AND QUIRKY HUMOUR, THE FIRST TWO EARTHWORM JIM GAMES ARE BY FAR THE BEST IN THE SERIES. THE FRANCHISE IS KNOWN FOR FEATURING MANY MEMORABLE MOMENTS, SO WHAT BETTER WAY TO CELEBRATE JIM THAN TO DEDICATE TWO PAGES TO SOME OF HIS FUNNIEST ESCAPADES?

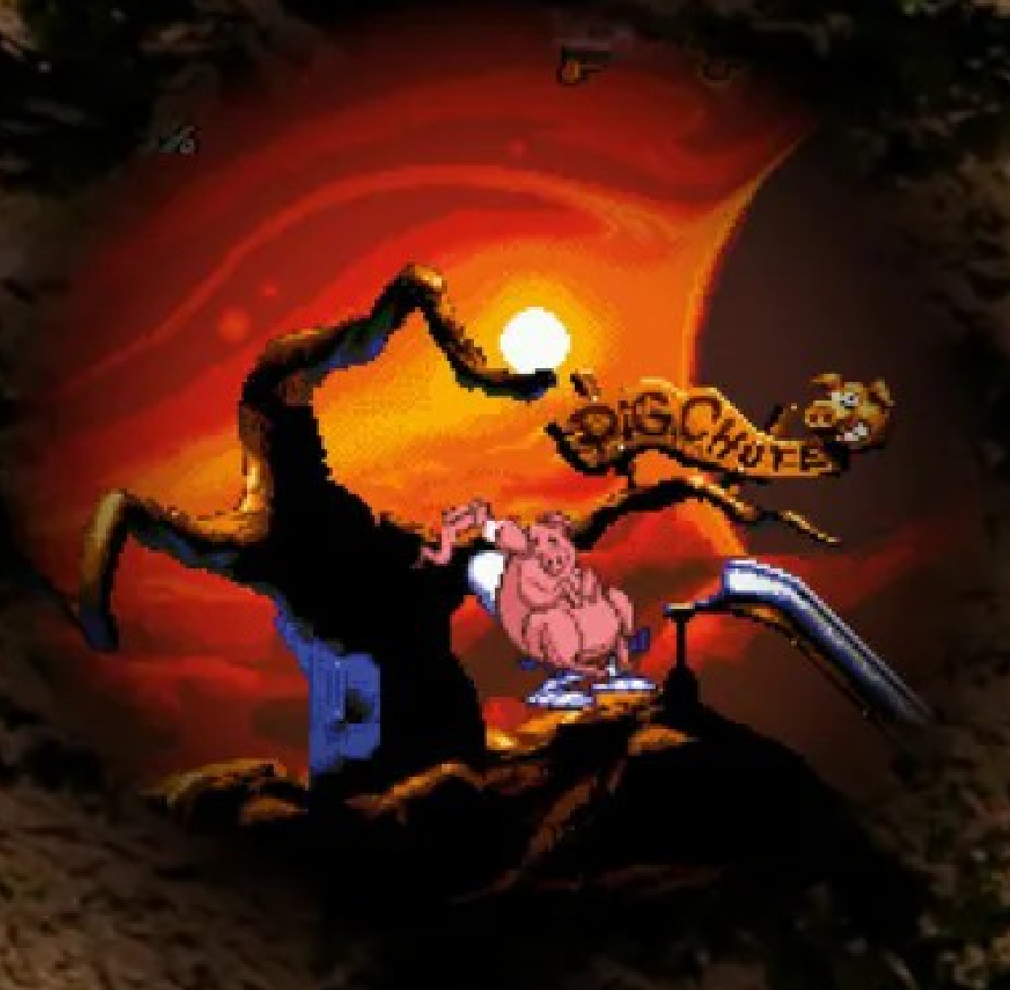
STAIRLIFT TO HEAVEN

■ **See it in:** Earthworm Jim 2

■ **Which level?:** Anything But Tangerines

Jim has to make his way up to a tall platform using the world's slowest stairlift, all while avoiding suicidal old ladies falling from the sky. Should Jim accidently catch one of the grannies on their descent, he gets a good handbagging all the way to the bottom floor and must, annoyingly, begin his ascent all over again.



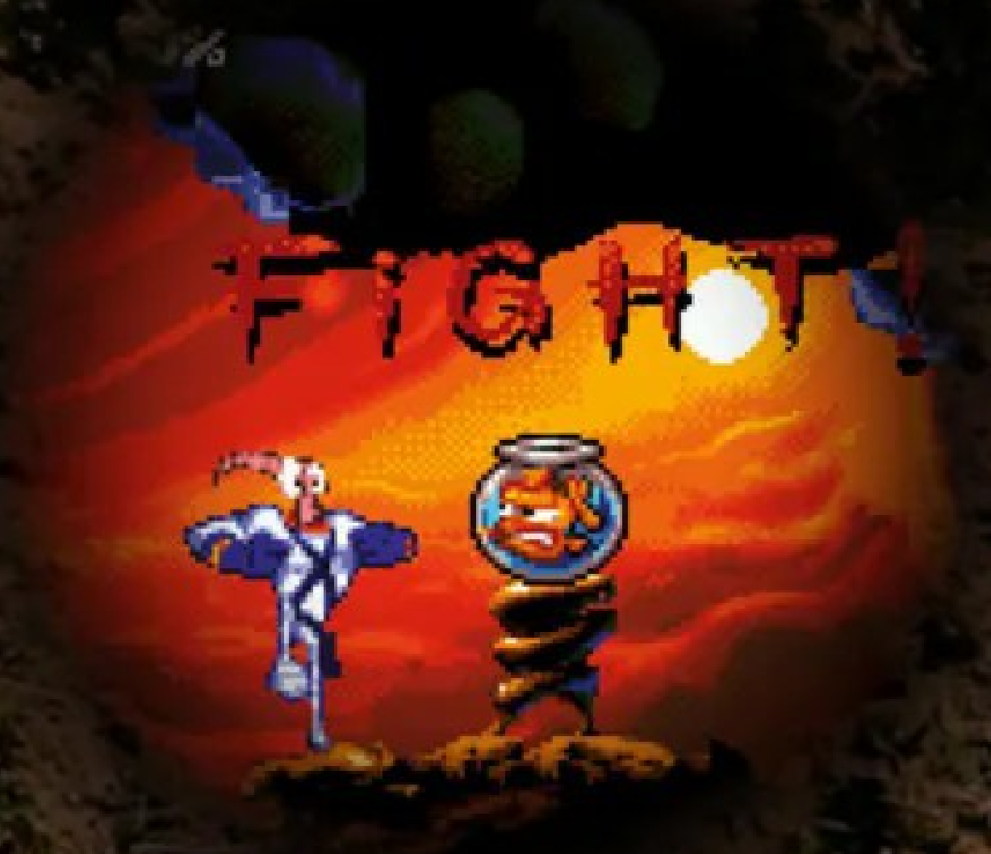


Hamburger Hill

■ **See it in:** Earthworm Jim 2

■ **Which level?:** Anything But Tangerines

To get past Bob the Killer Goldfish, Jim must carry a pig from its pen and then toss it down the conveniently placed Pig Chute. Doing so causes the portly porker to zip down the slide, fly into the sky and land headfirst into Bob's bowl, thus allowing Jim to continue on his merry way and complete the level.

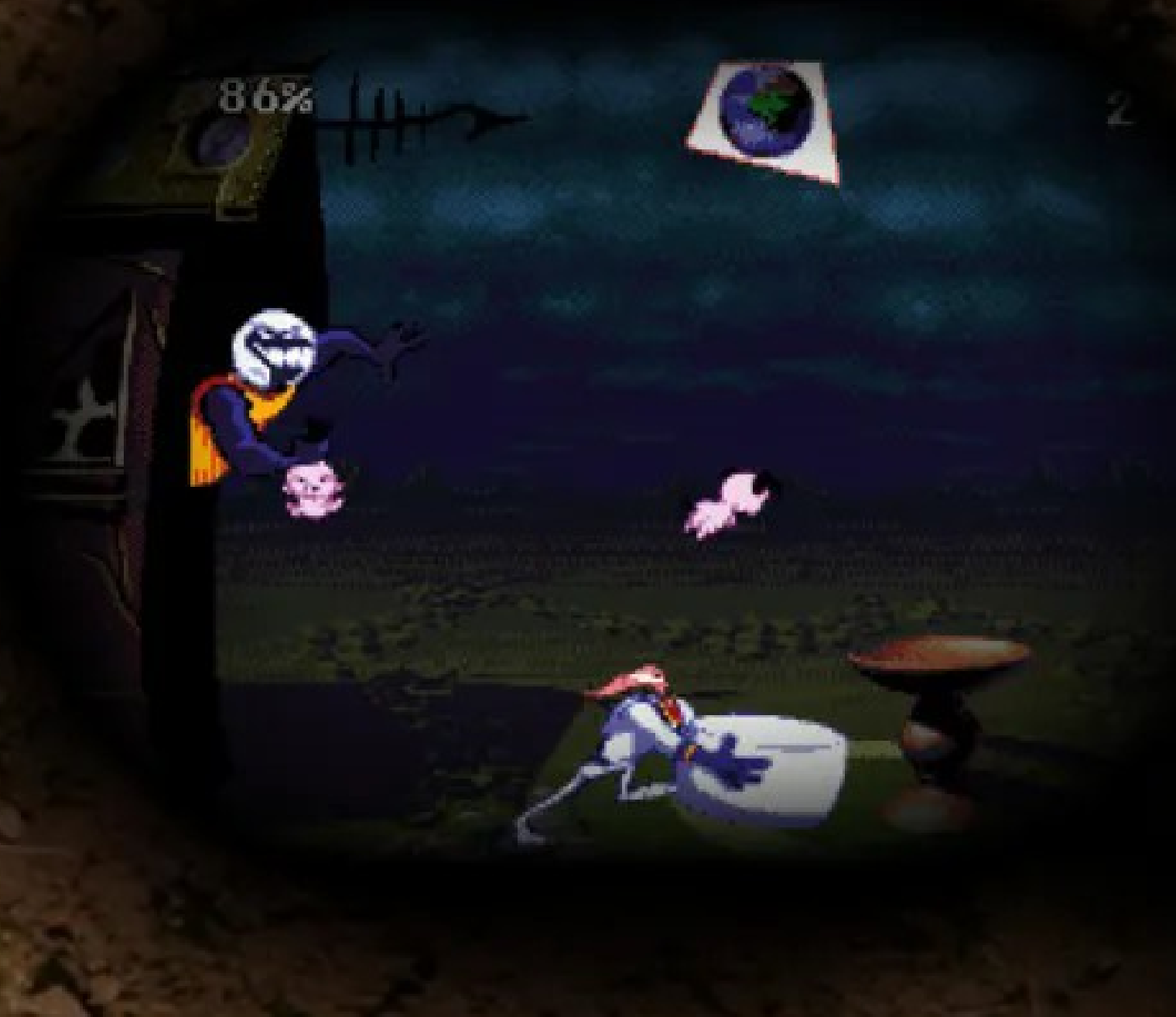


MORTAL CODBAT

■ **See it in:** Earthworm Jim 2

■ **Which level?:** Anything But Tangerines

In what can only be described as the easiest end-of-level boss in videogame history, Jim finally comes face to face with Bob the Killer Goldfish in a humorous *Mortal Kombat* parody. After the 'fight' message flashes up, Jim walks up to Bob, plucks him out of his bowl and swallows him without you having to even lift a finger.

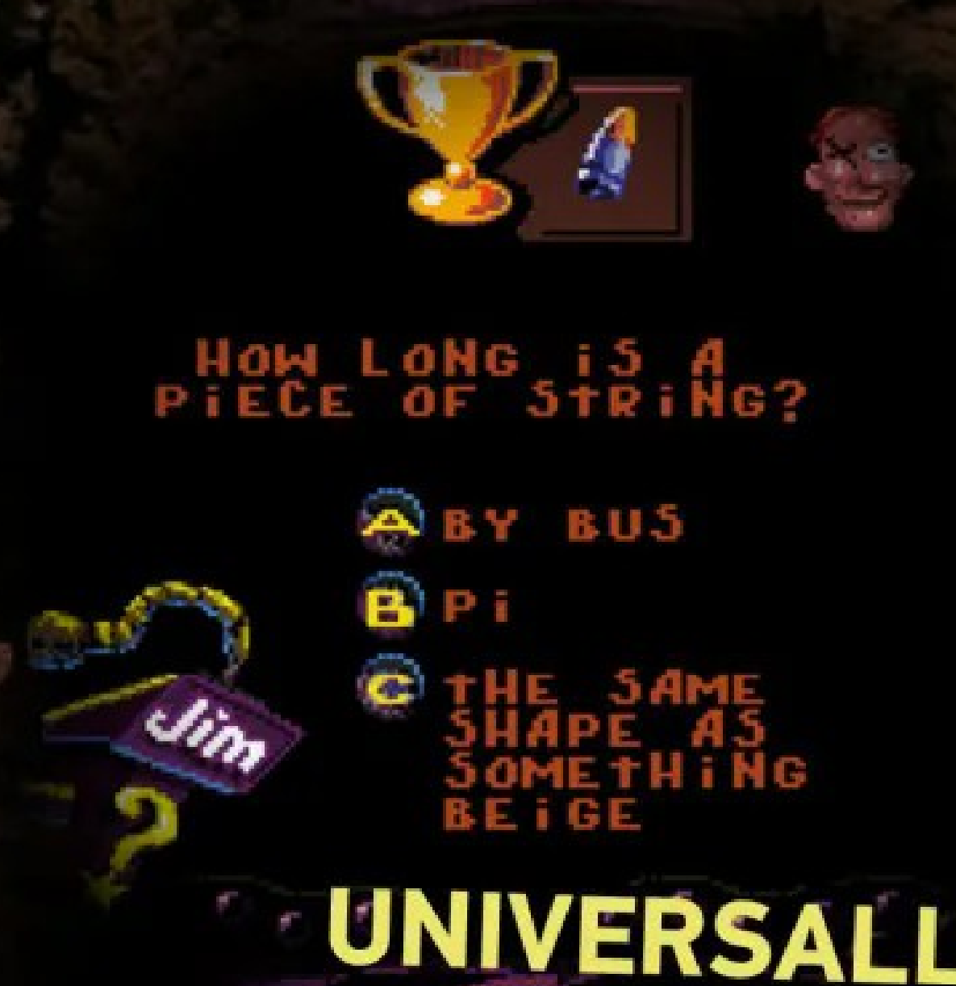


PUPPY LOVE

■ **See it in:** Earthworm Jim 2

■ **Which level?:** Puppy Love

In this recurring level, Jim has to protect Pete's young nephews who are being tossed out of a barn window by the evil Psy-Crow. A neat homage to Nintendo Game & Watch game *Fire*, it finds Jim cushioning their landings with what looks like a giant mushroom. Fail to save too many and Pete gets pretty angry and… well, let's just say you wouldn't like him when he's angry.



HOW LONG IS A PIECE OF STRING?

A BY BUS

B PI

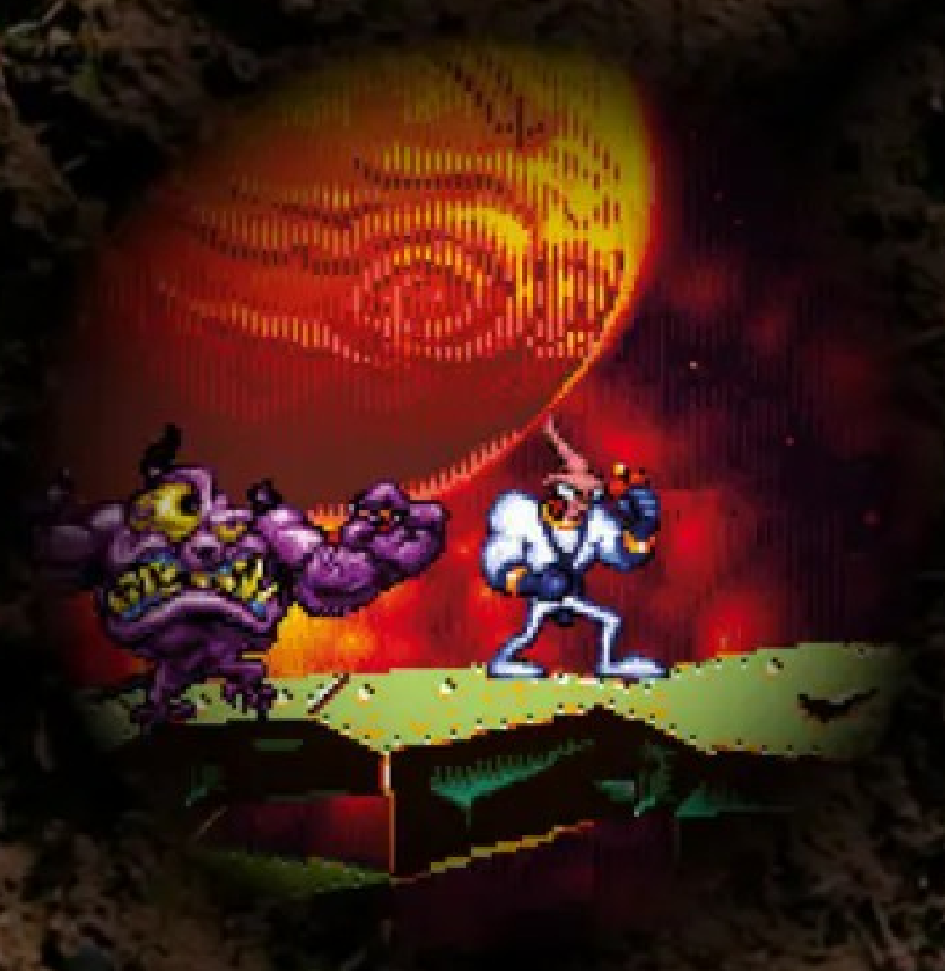
C THE SAME SHAPE AS SOMETHING BEIGE

UNIVERSALLY CHALLENGED

■ **See it in:** Earthworm Jim 2

■ **Which level?:** The Villi People/ Jim's Now A Blind Cave Salamander

Jim, who is now taking the form of a blind cave salamander (no, it's never explained), has to take part in a short quiz show and answer a series of nonsensical questions, like this one here. It's purely a guessing game and a bit fun so just hit either A, B or C and hope Lady Luck is with you.

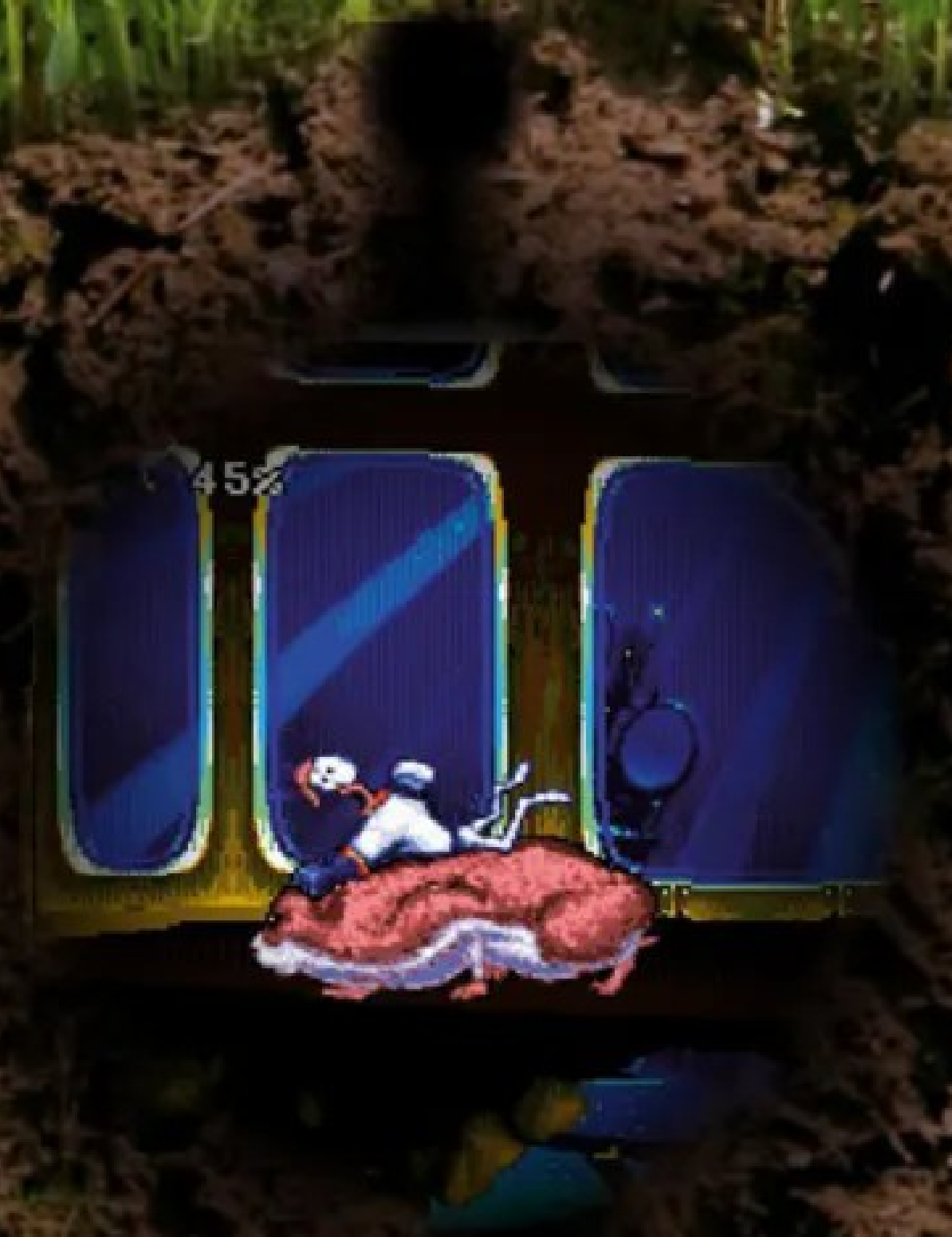


OUTER BODY EXPERIENCE

See it in: Earthworm Jim 1

Which level?: What The Heck

Jim is separated from his suit – this happens quite a lot in the games – and it really couldn't have come at a worse time. Evil the Cat, from an elevated position, is taking pot shots at our hero with his futuristic-looking rocket launcher, and there's no way for Jim to reach his suit. Or is there? The support holding up that platform looks awfully melty.



HAMSTAR

See it in: Earthworm Jim 1

Which level?: Down The Tubes

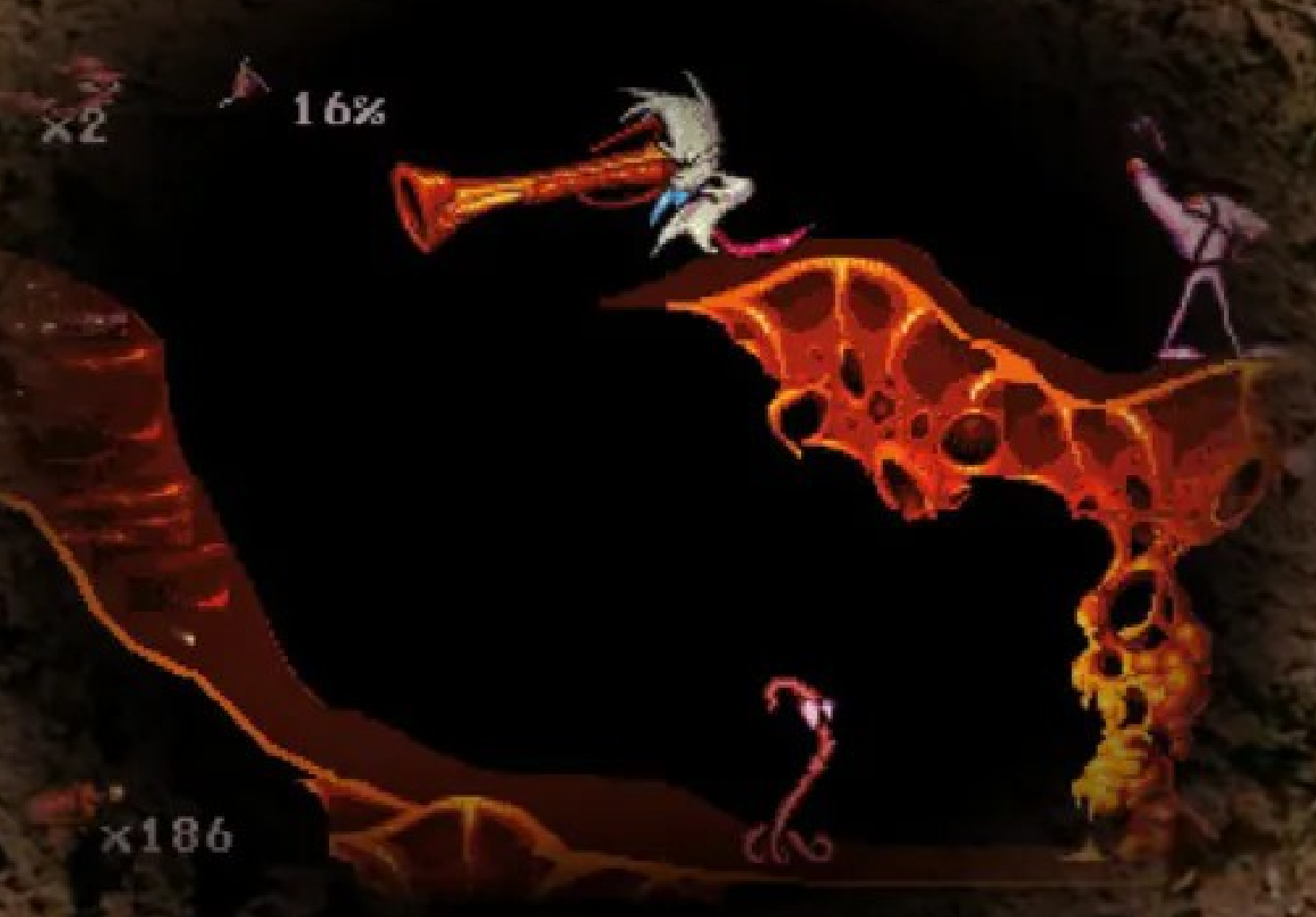
In a stage that may have been a big influence on the look of Rapture in *BioShock*, Jim is forced to run-and-gun his way through what can only be described as an underwater hamster run. The big clue, of course, is that the stage houses a few of these critters, which Jim can use to plough through the enemies blocking his way.

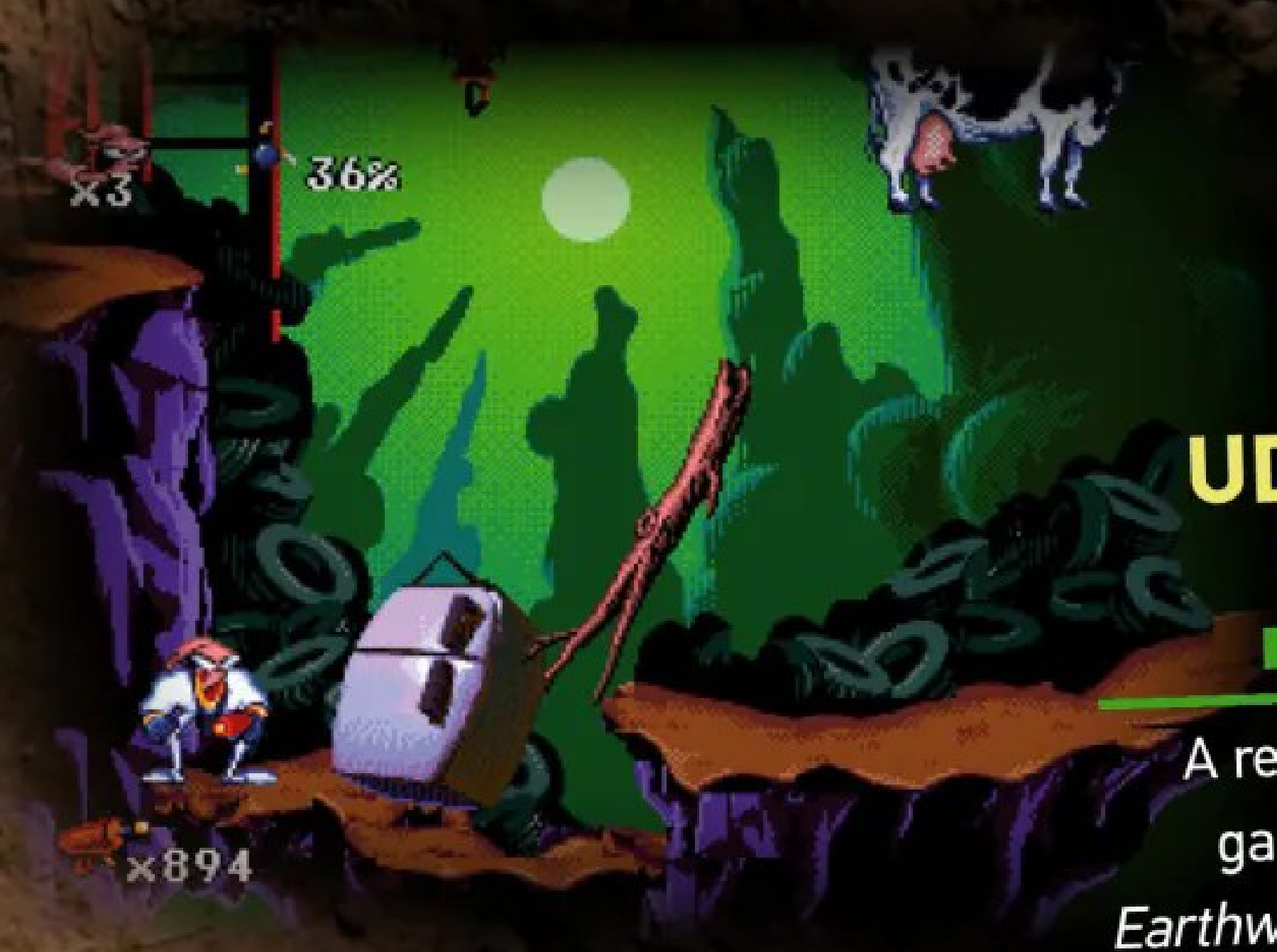
THE DOGGYGUARD

See it in: Earthworm Jim 1

Which level?: For Pete's Sake

Jim must safely escort Pete from one end of the stage to the next ensuring he comes to no harm. This involves whipping him into the air to prevent him from falling through gaps in the floor, and providing him with covering fire from enemies and asteroids. If Pete sustains any kind of injury, he turns into his muscular alter ego and starts chewing on Jim.



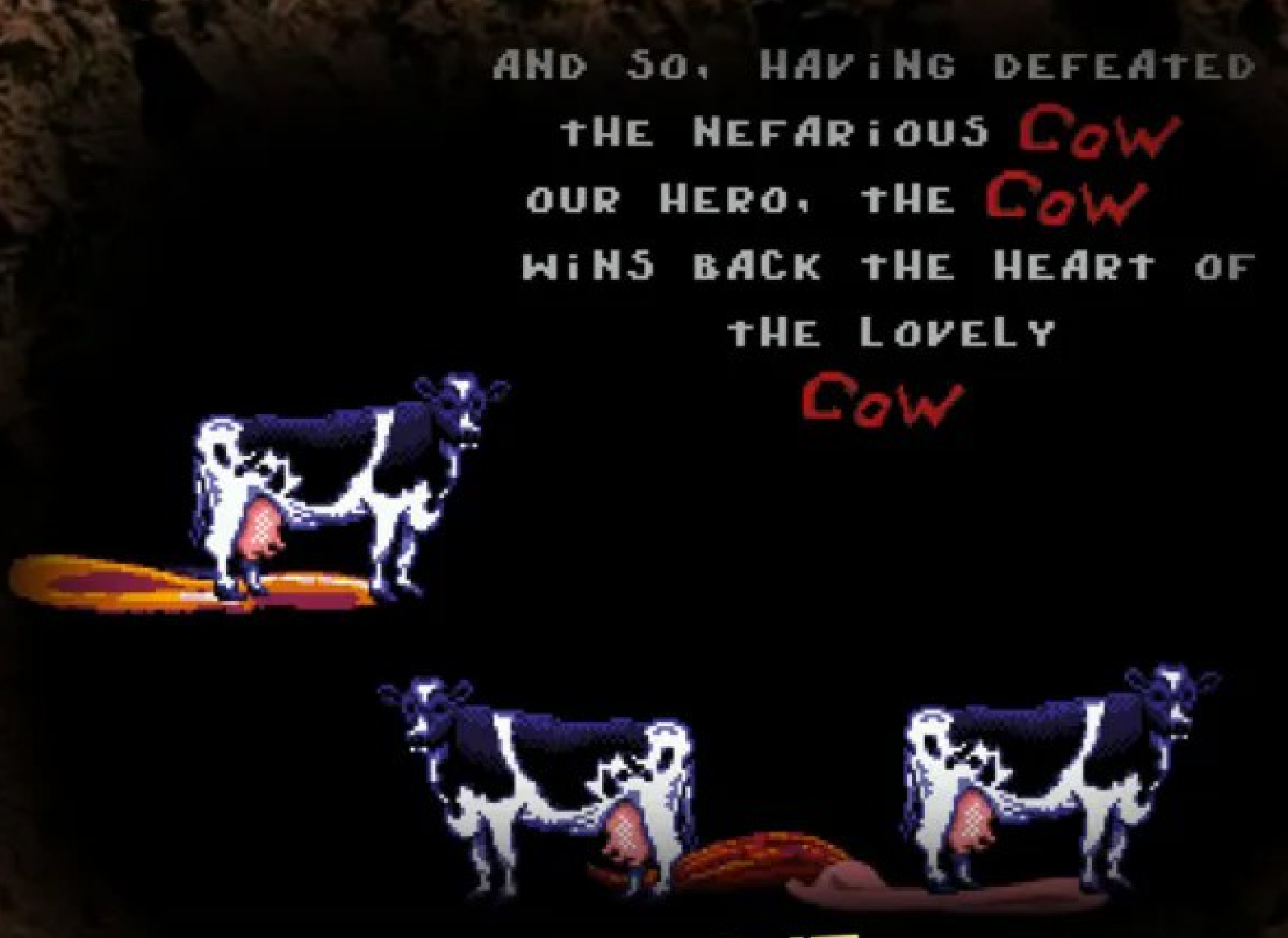


UDDERLY BRILLIANT

See it in: Earthworm Jim 1

Which level?: New Junk City

A recurring joke in Shiny Entertainment games, which was first introduced in *Earthworm Jim*, is the appearance of bovines. The first stage sees Jim launch a cow into the sky, and throughout the game it continues to make fleeting appearances in the background until finally coming to land right at the end of the game.



AND SO, HAVING DEFEATED
THE NEFARIOUS COW
OUR HERO, THE COW
WINS BACK THE HEART OF
THE LOVELY
COW

MILKING IT

See it in: Earthworm Jim 2

Which level?: See Jim Run, Run Jim Run!

The cow jokes continue on thick and fast through *Earthworm Jim 2*. There's a peculiar level that finds Jim carrying cows to milking stations, congratulatory screens featuring talking cows, and the game's ending too, which reveals that all the main players in the story are in fact just cows in costumes.

PIKACHU

Don't let the cute appearance and delightful squeaks fool you – the adorable mascot of the Pokémon series always brings the thunder

ICON PROFILE

» **NAME:** PIKACHU

» **FIRST APPEARANCE:** POKÉMON RED & BLUE

» **LAST SEEN IN:** NEW POKÉMON SNAP

» **FINEST HOUR:** DETECTIVE PIKACHU

» **NOTABLE FOR:** PIKA! PIKA!

There's more to being a great character than simply having an impeccable sense of style or coming out with sparkling dialogue, which is just as well for Pikachu – a naked electric rodent that can only say its own name. But despite being designed as a simple creature, Pikachu has nuzzled its way into our hearts over the years by displaying a breadth of character that far exceeds what should be possible with so basic a tool set. Pikachu has shown staunch loyalty, moments of cunning ingenuity, unbreakable resilience, formidable strength, and too many moments of doe-eyed cuteness to even be counted, and there's no better poster child for the popular *Pokémon* series, even if Pikachu wasn't originally intended to be the franchise's mascot.

No, during early development and the series' formative years, Clefairy was given just as much of the spotlight. The original Japanese manga placed just as much emphasis on the two Pokémon, and it wasn't until it was time to take the series worldwide that the camera was nudged to focus primarily on Pikachu as the franchise's star character, deemed to be a more universally appealing design. By the time *Pokémon* exploded in the west, Pikachu's beaming grin was appearing on everything from pencil cases to cereal packets, and there could be little doubt that Game Freak and Nintendo had finally settled on little ol' Pika as the face of the franchise. Its design has changed quite considerably over the years, however, with early depictions making it appear more hamster-like in its dumpy stature, slowly transitioning into a somewhat more lithe form that makes more sense given the feats of agility it has been seen to perform.

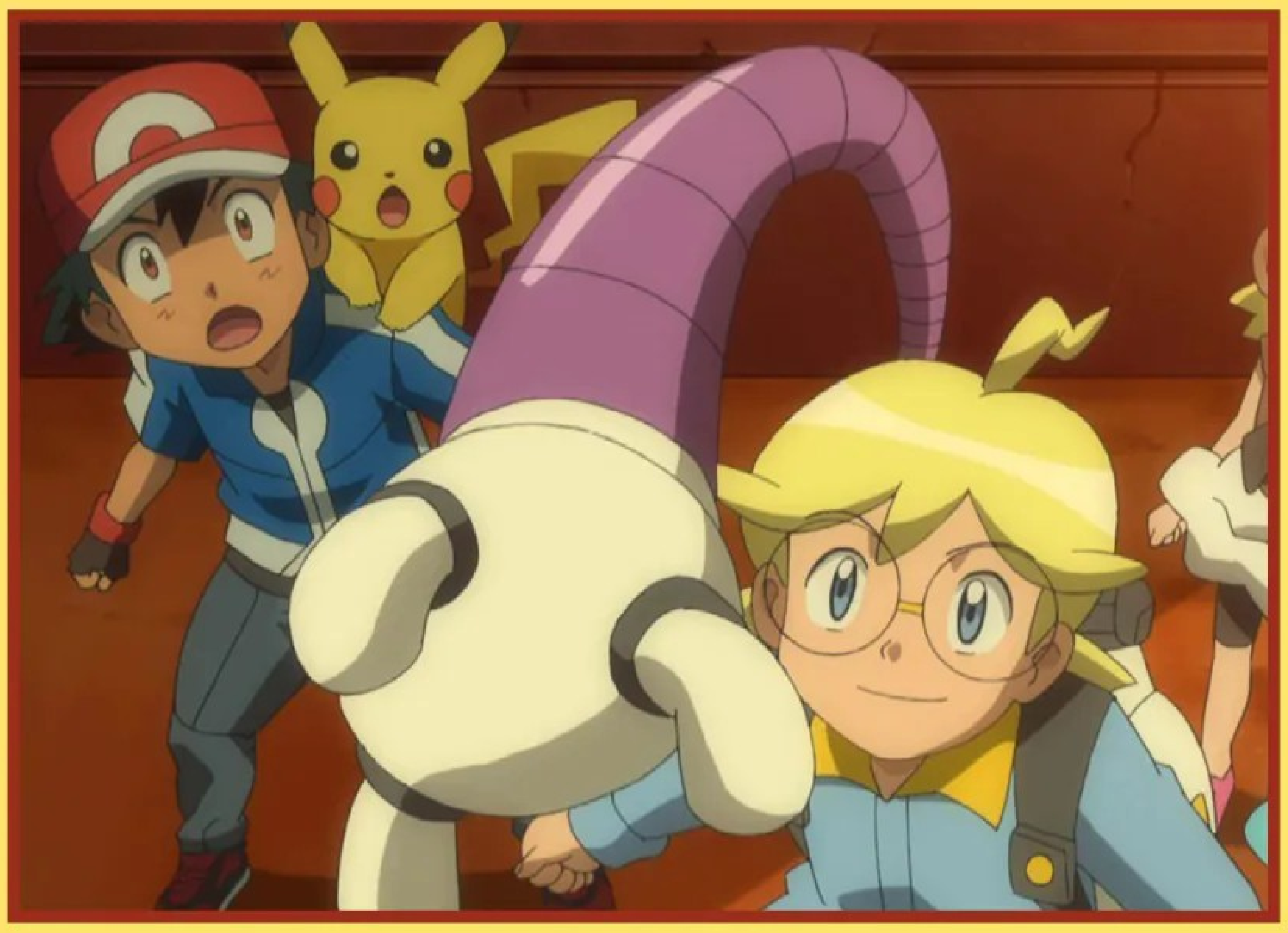
Unlike so many iconic Pokémon whose final evolutions are just as recognisable and popular as the basic versions, Pikachu's status dwarves that of its evolution Raichu, or even its cuddly little baby version, Pichu. A lot of this can be pinned on the anime, where Ash outright refused to evolve his partner Pokémon. Ash's Pikachu is made out to be extremely special in terms of its capabilities (hence why the bungling Team Rocket are always hatching hair-brained schemes to swipe the poor little critter). While other monsters like Gyarados and Dragonite are depicted as aspirational Pokémon whose huge power boosts upon evolving would never be turned down, Pikachu staying in its basic form for decades painted Raichu in a somewhat unfavourable light. Even when Game Freak changed up Raichu's design with an Alolan form for *Sun* and *Moon*, Pikachu's design would go untouched – testament to just how important this little yellow star is to *Pokémon* as a brand.

In-game depictions of Pikachu brings us to several other interesting points of discussion, starting with *Pokémon Yellow*. Game Freak retooled the original *Red* and *Blue* Game Boy games to create a special third edition where plot and characters were altered slightly to fall closer in line with the popular anime. Pikachu is the only available starter, Pokémon availability is rebalanced (such as offering Mankey for capture prior to the first Gym battle against Brock, since following in Ash's foolhardy footsteps and using Pikachu against Onix is a fool's errand within the mechanical constraints of a videogame), and your partner follows you around on the map, replete with a happiness mechanic based on how you treat it – something that would go on to be a staple part of later games and their evolution mechanics. The introduction of held items in *Gold* and *Silver* gave Game Freak another chance to give a boost to little Pikachu with the Light Orb, an object that doubles its offensive stats and makes Raichu that little bit more redundant. This was clearly meant to be a way of representing the superior power of Ash's Pikachu compared to regular wild ones, as evidenced by the fact that the only way to get a Light Orb at the time was to trade the partner Pikachu from *Yellow* across to *Gold/Silver*.

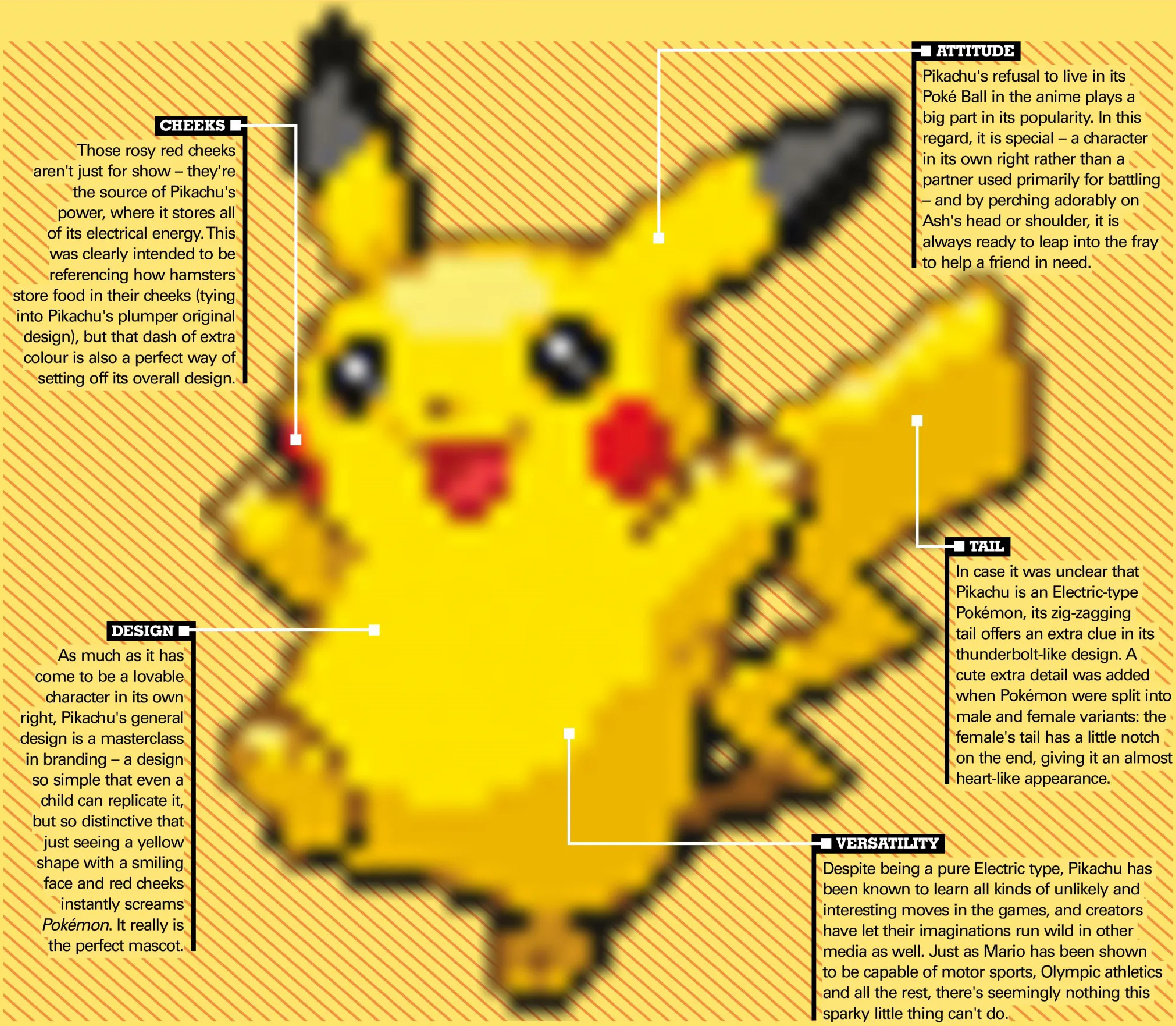
> **“Pikachu's beaming grin was appearing on everything from pencil cases to cereal”**

Despite other attempts to make Pikachu viable in the mainline games (such as unique variants, special moves and even beefier base stats in *Let's Go*), its ubiquitousness across the series remains far more important to Pikachu's popularity than its in-game usefulness. As the total Pokémon count continues to grow towards the 1,000 landmark, Pikachu is and always will be the most iconic and recognisable of the lot – a star of both small and big screen, of countless games and other media, and the grinning face of the biggest pop culture phenomenon of the late Nineties. Pikachu is a character that transcends videogames to become something much bigger, and there are few characters in the medium that can boast fame on this level. *

» After 20-odd animated movies, we finally got our first live-action *Pokémon* flick in *Detective Pikachu*. Sure, it has its problems, but fans will lap up the endless references, cameos, and awesome attention to detail.



» Many Pokémaniacs remember the original anime series fondly, despite its evident flaws. Over 1,000 episodes and seven generations later, good ol' Pikachu is still in the spotlight today.



ATTITUDE

Pikachu's refusal to live in its Poké Ball in the anime plays a big part in its popularity. In this regard, it is special – a character in its own right rather than a partner used primarily for battling – and by perching adorably on Ash's head or shoulder, it is always ready to leap into the fray to help a friend in need.

CHEEKS

Those rosy red cheeks aren't just for show – they're the source of Pikachu's power, where it stores all of its electrical energy. This was clearly intended to be referencing how hamsters store food in their cheeks (tying into Pikachu's plumper original design), but that dash of extra colour is also a perfect way of setting off its overall design.

TAIL

In case it was unclear that Pikachu is an Electric-type Pokémon, its zig-zagging tail offers an extra clue in its thunderbolt-like design. A cute extra detail was added when Pokémon were split into male and female variants: the female's tail has a little notch on the end, giving it an almost heart-like appearance.

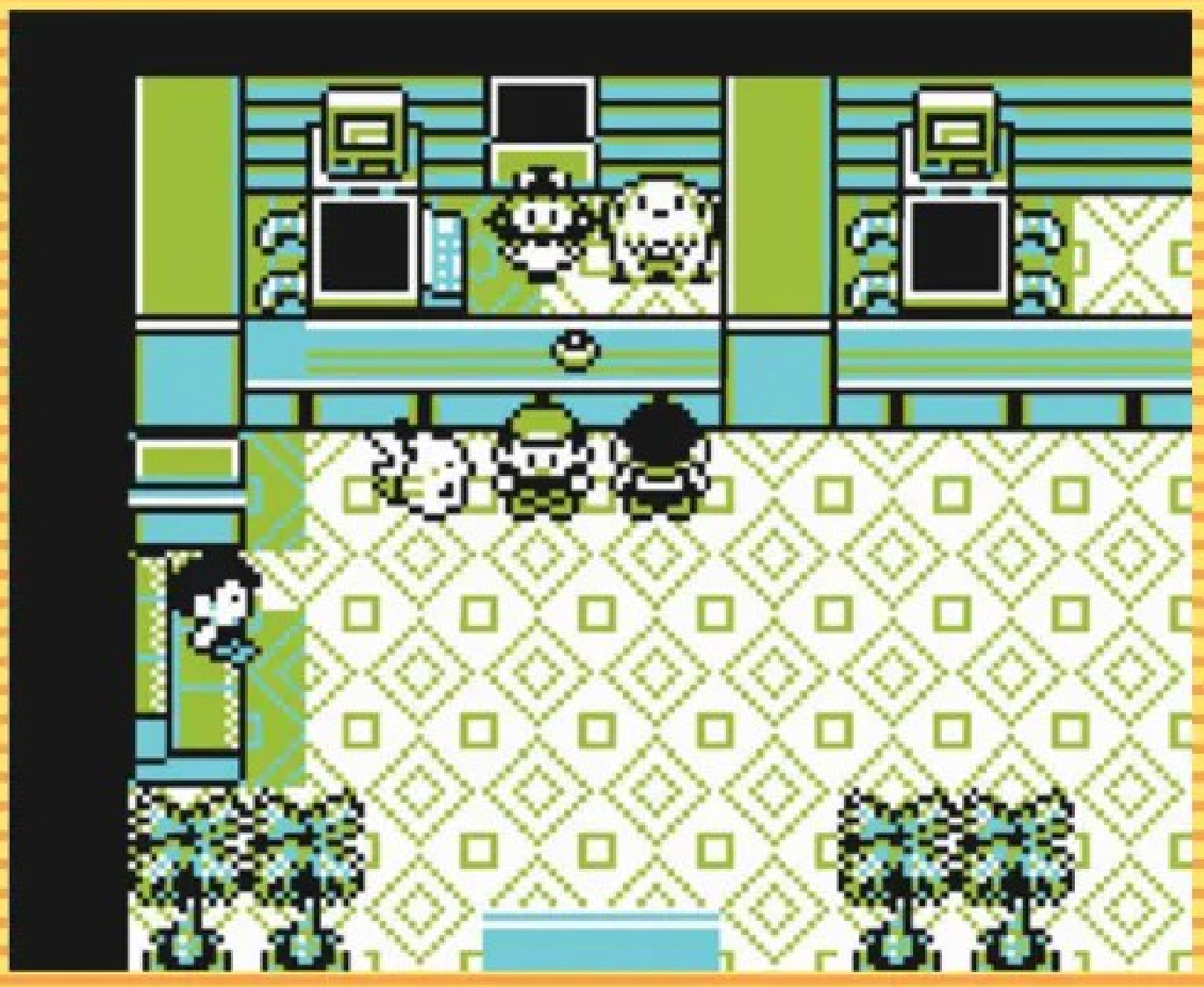
DESIGN

As much as it has come to be a lovable character in its own right, Pikachu's general design is a masterclass in branding – a design so simple that even a child can replicate it, but so distinctive that just seeing a yellow shape with a smiling face and red cheeks instantly screams *Pokémon*. It really is the perfect mascot.

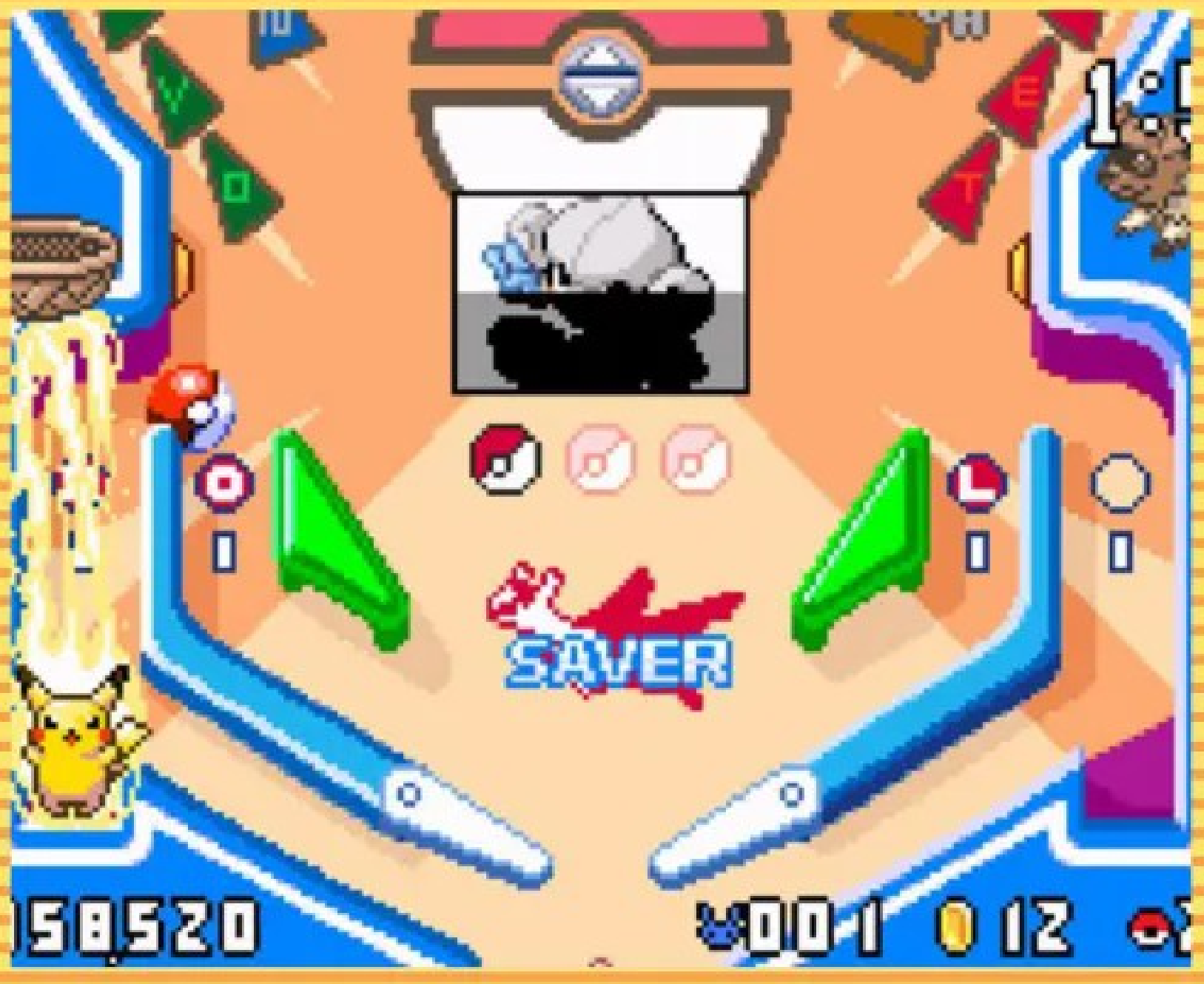
VERSATILITY

Despite being a pure Electric type, Pikachu has been known to learn all kinds of unlikely and interesting moves in the games, and creators have let their imaginations run wild in other media as well. Just as Mario has been shown to be capable of motor sports, Olympic athletics and all the rest, there's seemingly nothing this sparky little thing can't do.

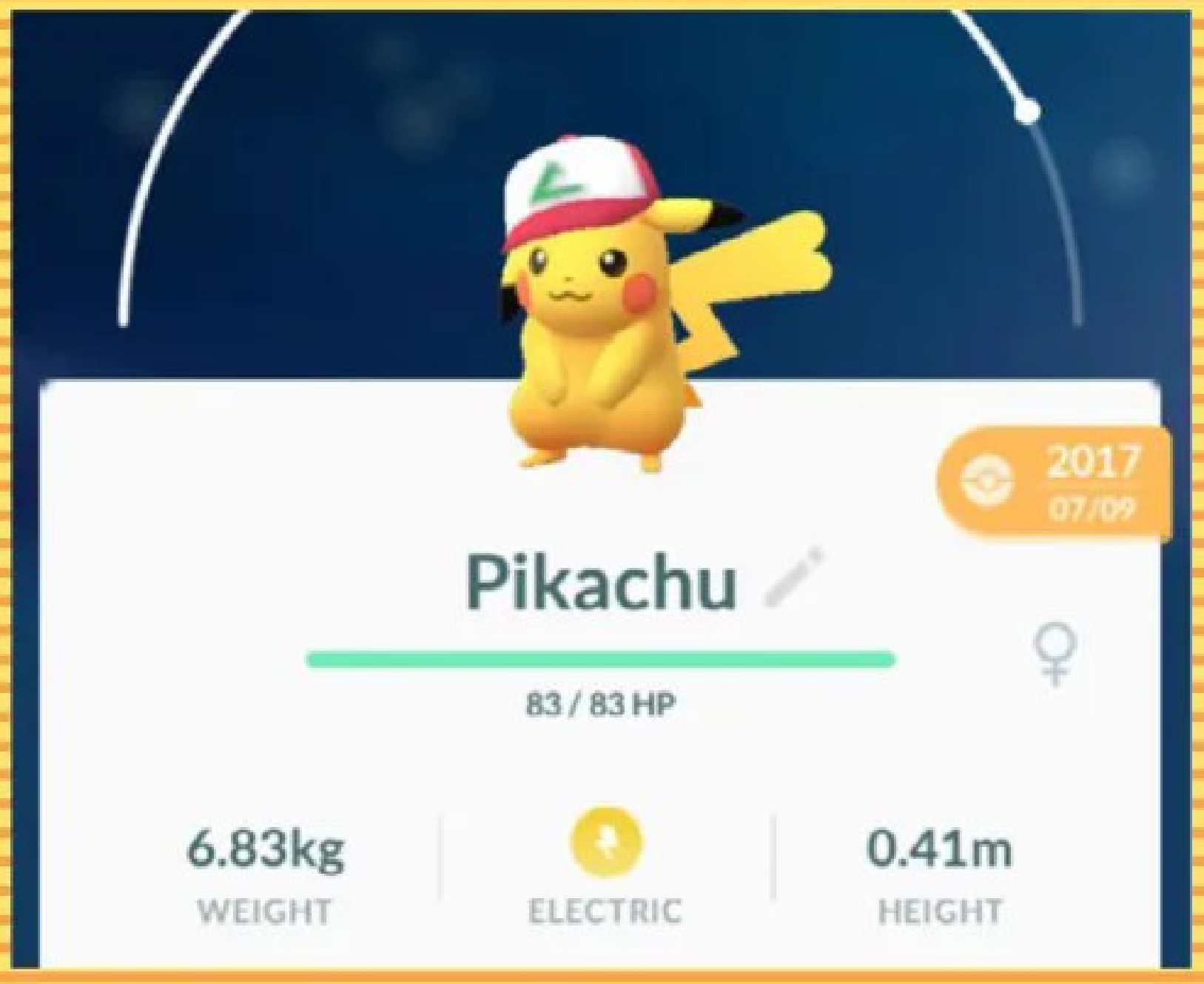
> MAGIC MOMENTS



■ *Pokémon Yellow Version* reworked the game slightly to be more in keeping with the anime.

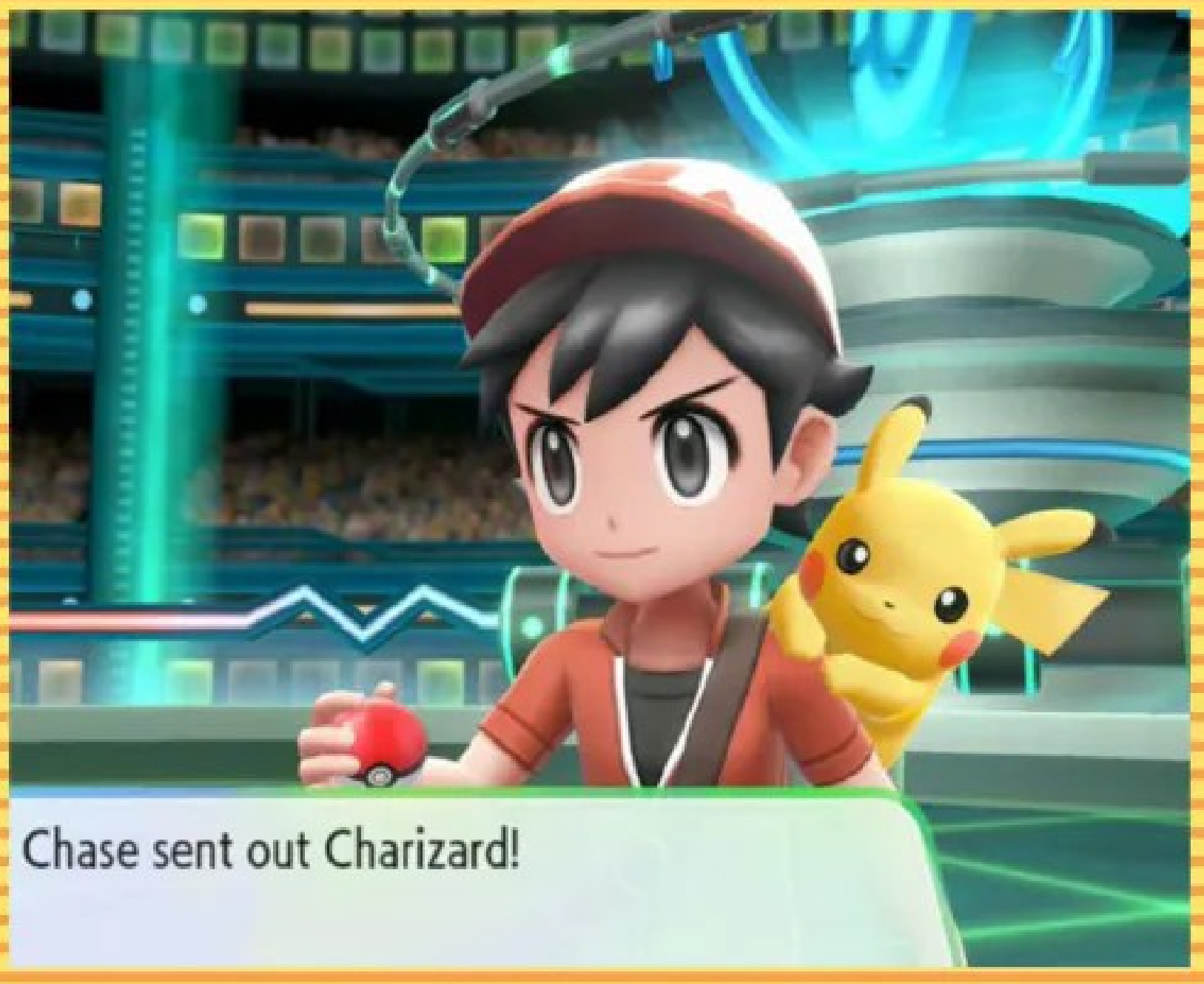


■ *Pokémon Pinball Ruby & Sapphire* featured the franchise's mascot as a handy ball saver.



Pikachu
83 / 83 HP
6.83kg WEIGHT
ELECTRIC
0.41m HEIGHT

■ Limited-time *Pokémon GO* events enable the capture of Pikachu in all kinds of fancy hats.

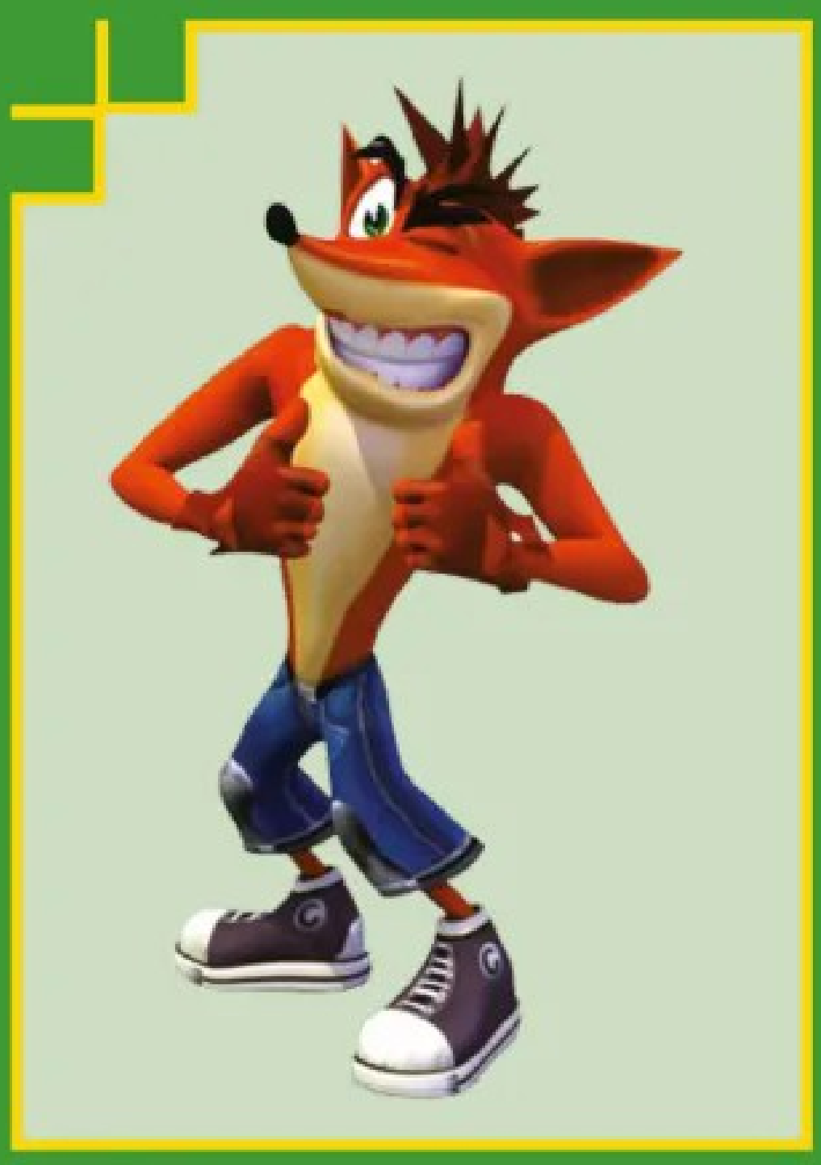


Chase sent out Charizard!

■ *Let's Go Pikachu/Eevee* were ostensibly remakes of *Pokémon Yellow* for Switch.

CRASH BANDICOOT

The last of the memorable mascot platformers, Crash entered the gaming world with a bang



ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** CRASH BANDICOOT
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** CRASH BANDICOOT
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** CRASH BANDICOOT N.SANE TRILOGY
- **» FINEST HOUR:** CRASH BANDICOOT 2: CORTEX STRIKES BACK
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** APPLES

Following the runaway success of Mario and Sonic, an army of mascots marched upon the gaming world throughout the Nineties. Many of these soldiers seeked to steal the crown from the duo of iconic forerunners in their own platforming titles. However, despite their best efforts, the likes of Zool, Bubsy and Awesome Possum couldn't reach the heights of Nintendo's and Sega's juggernauts… except one: Crash Bandicoot.

The plucky hero was created by Andy Gavin and Jason Rubin at Naughty Dog, who wanted to make a character for Sony's PlayStation that would rival Nintendo's and Sega's heroes. Originally the character was designed as Willie the Wombat, though the team realised there was already a non-videogame character by that name, and instead shifted Willie's design into a bandicoot character called Crash. As for his titular debut game, Gavin and Rubin wanted to create "Sonic's Ass Game", which was their code for 'a linear platformer with a strong hero character (inspired by Sonic, obviously) set in 3D environments where you mainly saw the rear of the character'.

The game, simply titled *Crash Bandicoot*, was released in 1996 to a warm reception by both consumers and critics. Crash's success isn't down to great character design or an acclaimed series of games (though both of those elements did factor into his popularity), it was rather the timing of his arrival. Sony had swung into the videogaming business with its PlayStation, and this new console that was taking the world by storm needed a standard bearer the public could associate it with. Crash arrived at the ideal time to fill that slot, spinning onto the PlayStation just as its popularity was rocketing, and the loveable bandicoot rode that success with all the grace of an expert surfboarder. It wasn't long before people began to associate Crash and PlayStation together much like Mario and Nintendo, and Sonic and Sega were intertwined.

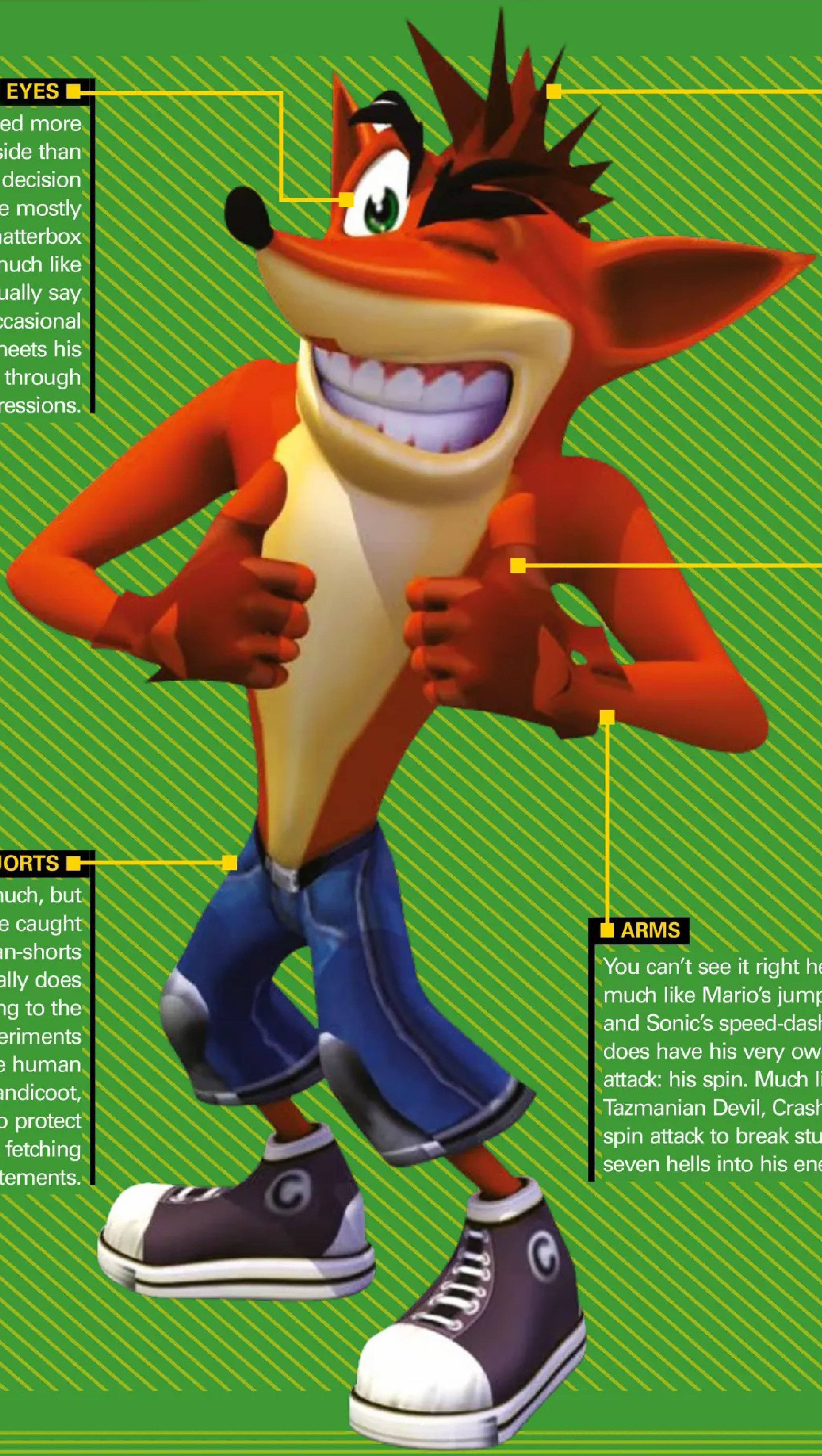
Throughout the original PlayStation's lifespan, Crash saw a successful trilogy of 3D platforming games from Naughty Dog, as well as spin-off kart racer *CTR: Crash Team Racing* and party game *Crash Bash* – though the latter was, ahem, bashed a little by critics. This is often cited as the golden era for Crash Bandicoot; under Naughty Dog the unlikely hero became a household name, and was heading from strength to strength, but that period had to end at some point.

For Sony's follow-up console, Naughty Dog decided to establish a new franchise, and instead passed Crash Bandicoot to publisher Vivendi and developer Traveller's Tales. The character's first foray into this new generation saw him go multiplatform, appearing on PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube in *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath Of Cortex.* Though not as well received as any of Naughty Dog's *Crash* titles, it still performed well, selling over 1.6 million copies on PlayStation 2 in the USA alone. However, this is where the decline started to set in. Though it happened gradually over the course of a decade, Crash's reputation fell from an A-list gaming character to a bargain bucket has-been. Both Traveller's Tales and Radical Entertainment (the primary developers of *Crash* games from 2001 to 2008) didn't know where to take the game design. Much like Sonic the Hedgehog, Crash became a victim of experimentation: in *TwinSanity*, he was shackled to his nemesis, Dr Neo Cortex; *Crash Of The Titans* granted him the ability to 'jack' enemies; and *Mind Over Mutant* shifted the character to a beat-'em-up setting. Following *Mind Over Mutant*, the character went into retirement for almost a decade, his reputation seemingly tarnished beyond repair.

Everybody loves a redemption story, though, and Crash has one that's perhaps one of the most successful of recent memory. Rumbles of Crash's return to gaming began when he became a part of the *Skylanders* universe in 2016's *Skylanders: Imaginators* from Vicarious Visions. Here, the team created a classic *Crash*-inspired level that led many to believe the team had bigger plans for the plucky bandicoot. They were right. In 2017, Vicarious Visions and Activision unleashed a full-on remake of the first three *Crash* games, called *Crash Bandicoot N Sane Trilogy.* While not perfect, the collection struck a chord with both those older and younger demographics. The former was pulled in on Nineties nostalgia while the latter was drawn in by the simple game design and lovable character, much like gamers were with Crash's original debut. The trilogy was a roaring success and dominated sales charts throughout 2017. By February 2019 the game's sales exceeded 10 million. *Crash Team Racing Nitro-Fueled* followed in June 2019, proving that the Bandicoot has indeed returned to stay, and we're glad: gaming wouldn't be the same without his goofy antics. ✱

> **"THE TRILOGY WAS A ROARING SUCCESS"**

■ Crash Bandicoot made his full return to gaming with *Crash Bandicoot N Sane Trilogy*, and dominated sales for 2017.



EYES
Naughty Dog erred more towards the Nintendo side than Sega when making the decision that Crash should be mostly mute. Unlike blue chatterbox Sonic, Crash behaves much like Mario and doesn't actually say much apart from the occasional 'WHOA!' when he meets his doom. He speaks more through his actions and facial expressions.

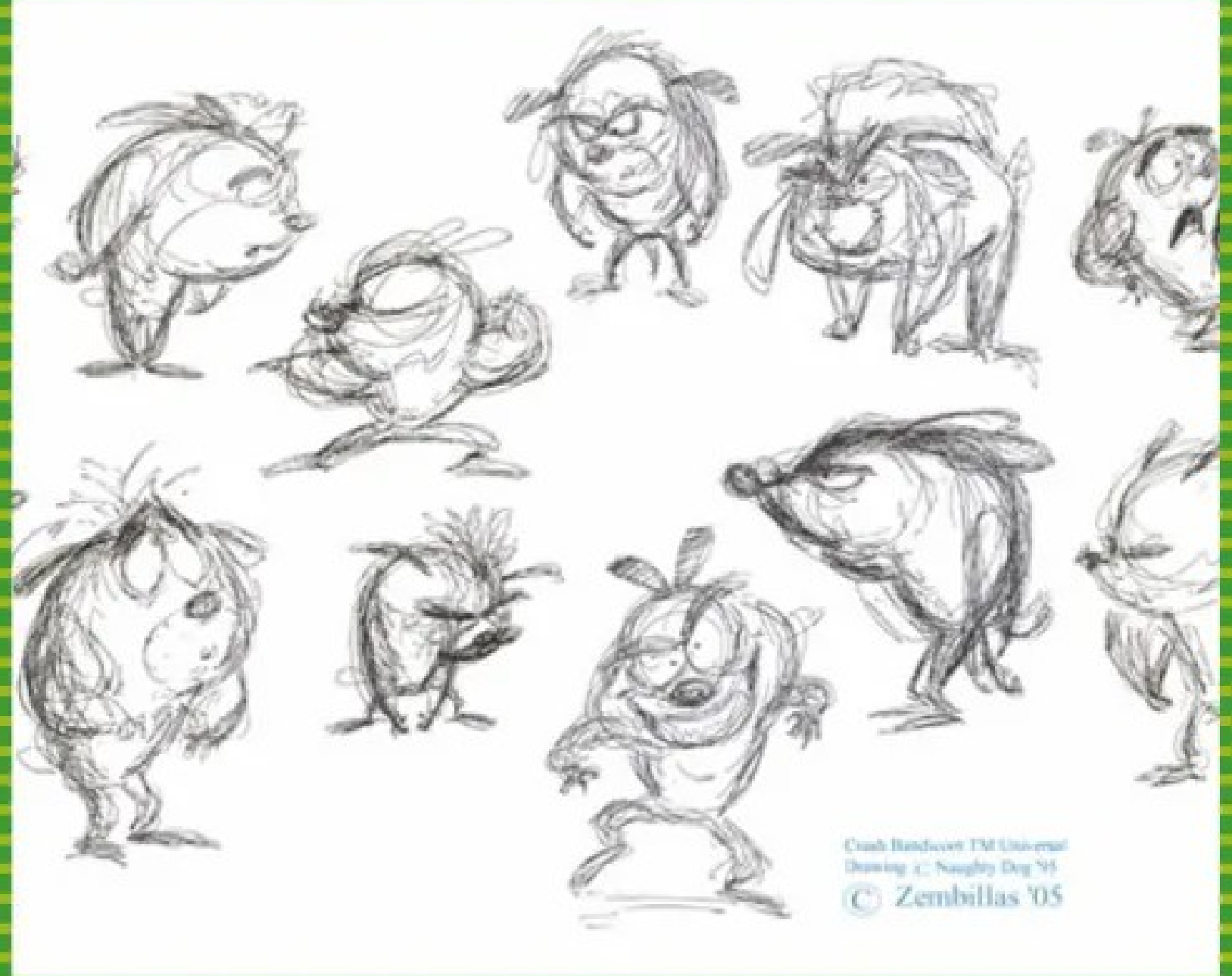
HAIR
Every successful mascot character has some form of hairstyle or hat that helps to define who they are, and Crash has proved to be no exception. Our hero sports a wild mohawk hairstyle, highlighting both his craziness and laid-back attitude. In more recent years, his 'do has become a little more relaxed – perhaps he conditions it now?

THUMBS
Close your eyes and picture the Nineties for a bit. Britpop, Will Smith, Bart Simpson, Ant and Dec. It was all a bit laid back, right? And Crash is a quintessential Nineties Kid. He's goofy and easy going, but can do the business when he needs to.

JORTS
It might not seem much, but our hero wouldn't be caught dead without his jean-shorts and trainers. This actually does have some wider meaning to the character: Dr Cortex's experiments have given Crash more human qualities than a typical bandicoot, and so Crash likes to protect his modesty with these fetching fashion statements.

ARMS
You can't see it right here, but much like Mario's jump-stomps and Sonic's speed-dashes, Crash does have his very own iconic attack: his spin. Much like Taz the Tazmanian Devil, Crash uses his spin attack to break stuff and knock seven hells into his enemies.

> MAGIC MOMENTS



■ Naughty Dog's original concept art for 'Willie The Wombat'.

■ Crash Bandicoot made his debut on Sony's brand new 32-bit console, the PlayStation.

■ The final 'proper' *Crash* game from Naughty Dog, *Warped* was released in 1998.

■ Crash ended an almost decade-long hiatus by appearing in *Skylanders: Imaginators*.

CRASH'S LEGACY

CRASH BANDICOOT

■ Crash's debut is a little ropey to return to today, but still great fun. Stages are split into side-scrolling and into-the-screen designs, across three islands of escalating difficulty. Our heroic bandicoot is charged with saving his girlfriend from the dastardly Dr Neo Cortex

CRASH BANDICOOT 2: CORTEX STRIKES BACK

■ Naughty Dog returned with more resolve and bigger ideas for itsCrash's sequel. *Cortex Strikes Back* features a more involved story, introducing Cortex's lacky, Dr N Gin, and Crash's brainbox sister, Coco. This follow-up also introduced the 'warp room' to select levels.

CRASH BANDICOOT: WARPED

■ For many, *Warped* is the high point of the series. Here, Crash has to journey across time to stop Cortex's latest machinations, who is being aided by the evil mask, Uka Uka. *Warped* built on ideas from the previous two games, and also threw in vehicular levels.

CTR: CRASH TEAM RACING

■ Naughty Dog's *Crash* swansong wasn't an explosive finale, but still fun. This *Mario Kart* contender replicates its inspiration's fun, while also introducing new mechanics: we particularly like that weapons become super-charged if you collect ten Wumpa Fruit.

CRASH BANDICOOT: THE WRATH OF CORTEX

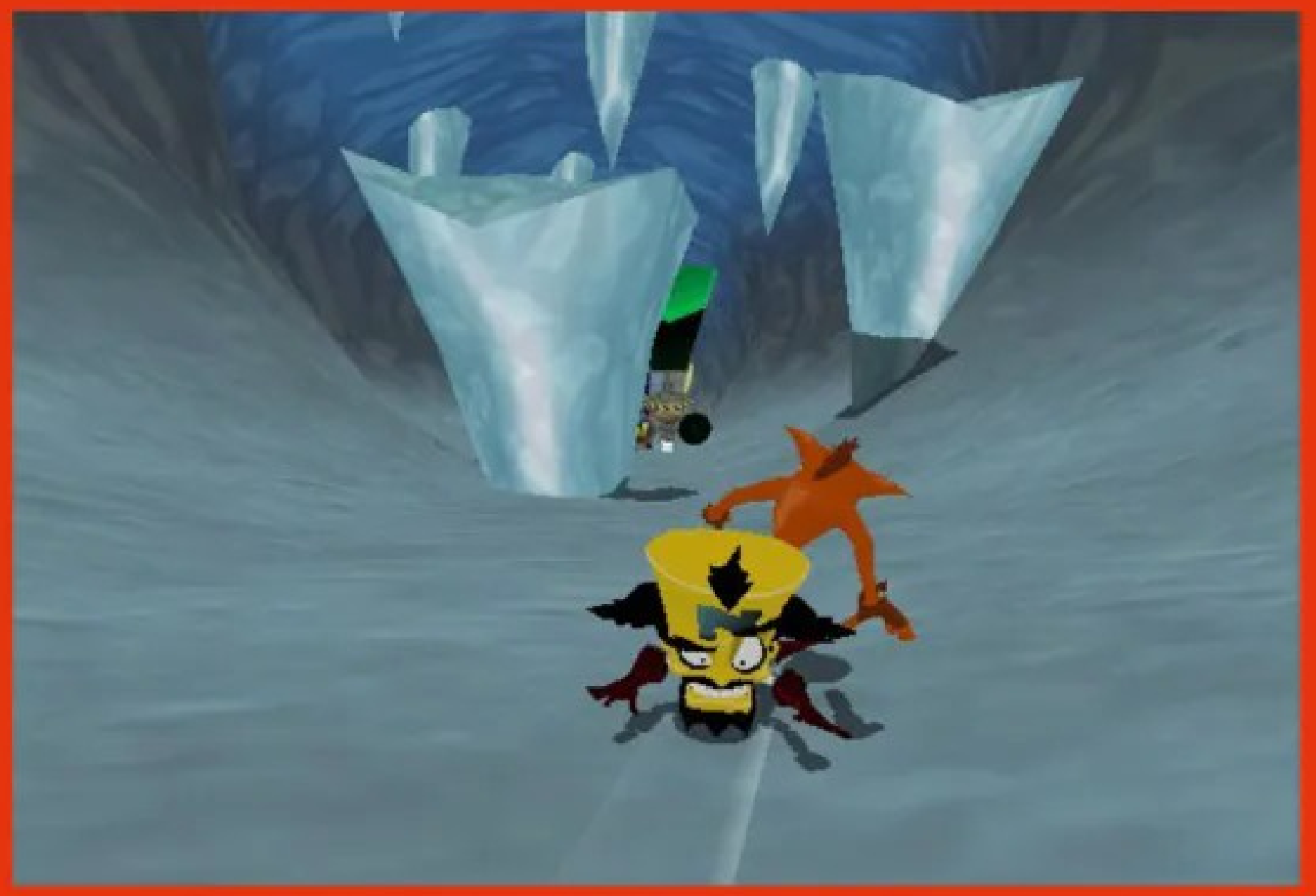
■ Crash's first game under Vivendi was a decent effort, but didn't really bring anything new to the table. *Wrath Of Cortex* played more like an expansion to *Warped*, with more enhanced graphics that took advantage of the PS2, Xbox and GameCube's capabilities.

CRASH NITRO KART

■ Looking to continue Crash's successful side-hustle of kart racing, this follow-up by Vicarious Visions, much like *The Wrath Of Cortex*, didn't set the world aflame. That said, *Nitro Kart* was probably as close to *Mario Kart* as you were gonna get on non-Nintendo systems.

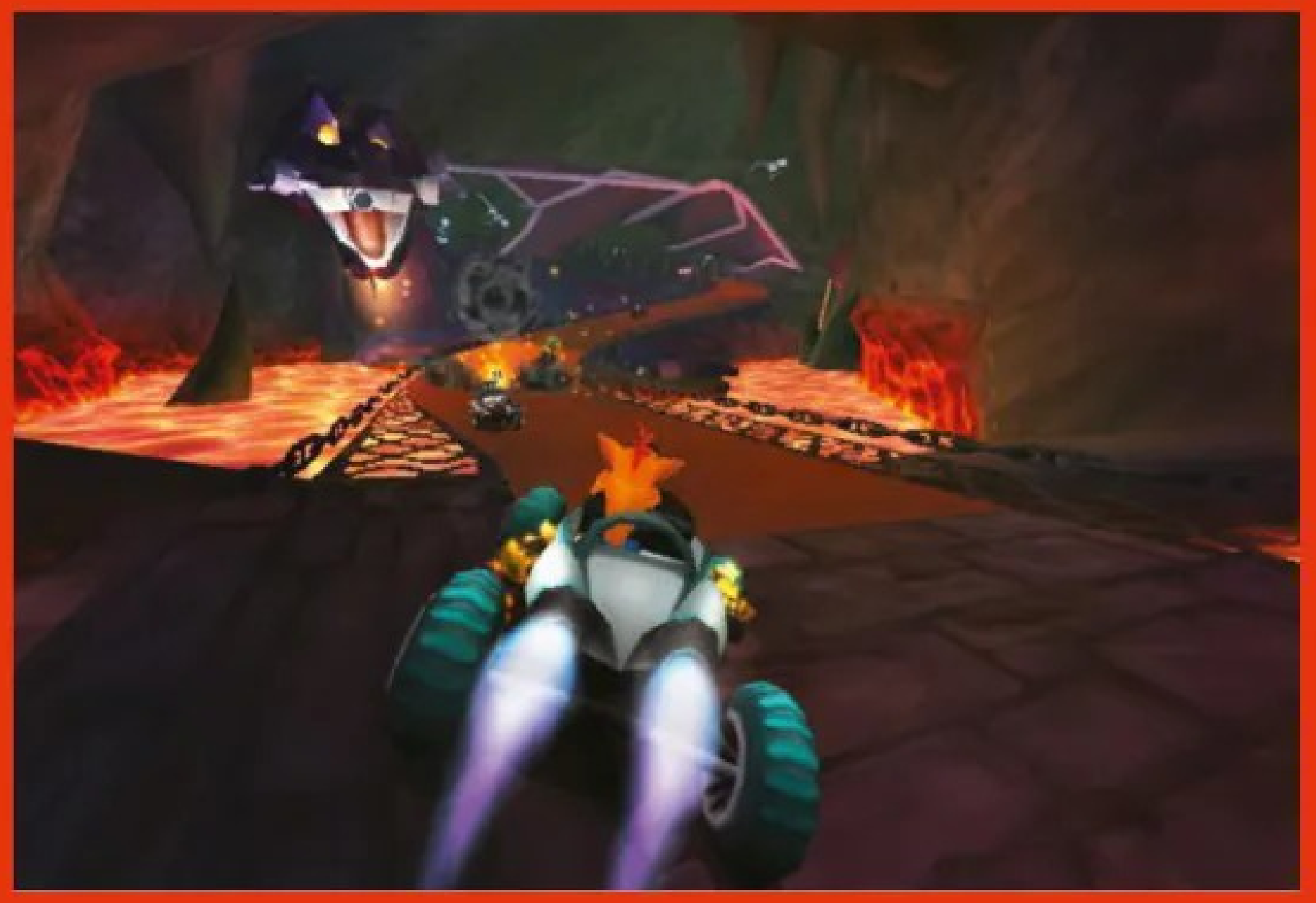
CRASH TWINSANITY

While *Wrath Of Cortex* was criticised for sticking too closely to *Warped*, *Twinsanity* tried something different. Here, Crash is forced to team up with his nemesis, Dr Neo Cortex, and you can use both of them to help save Wumpa Island. The comedy from Cortex is a particular highlight.



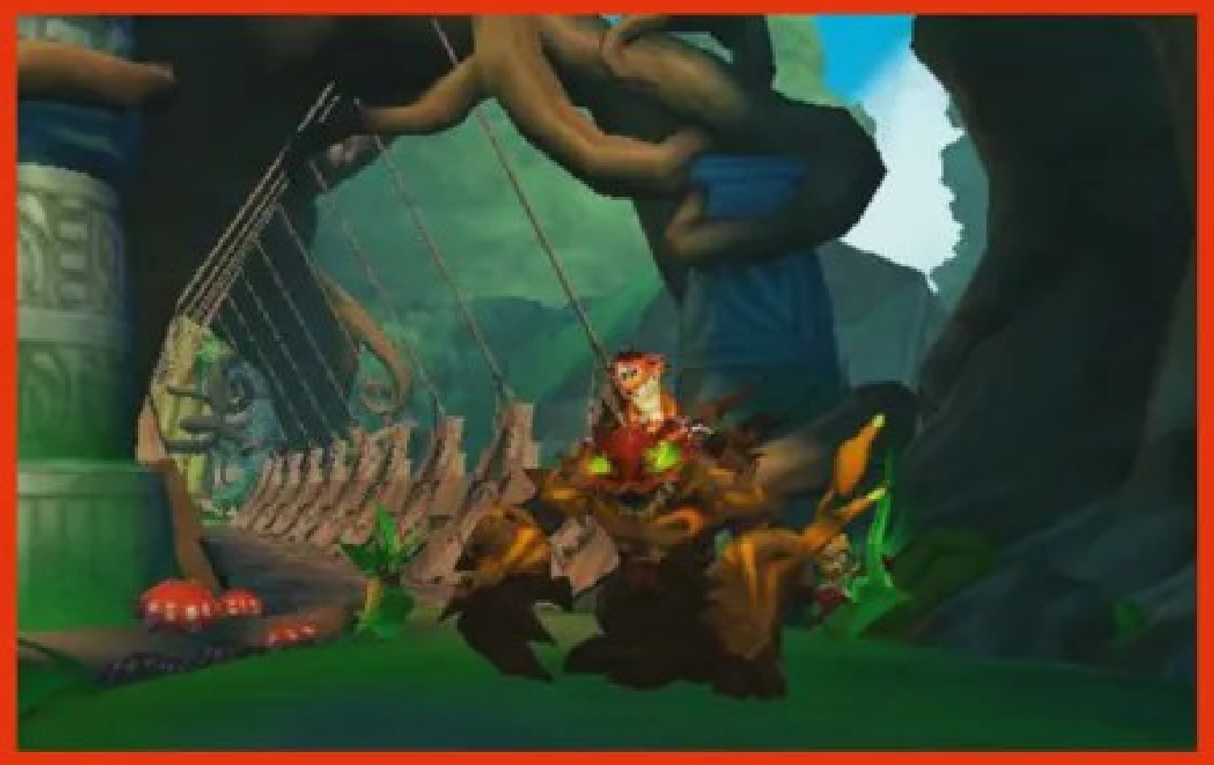
CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

The third racing game to star Crash and his mates proves to be pretty much business as usual. The main new mechanic in the game is the ability to 'clash' with other karts, allowing the karts to merge together in order to produce some powerful attacks.



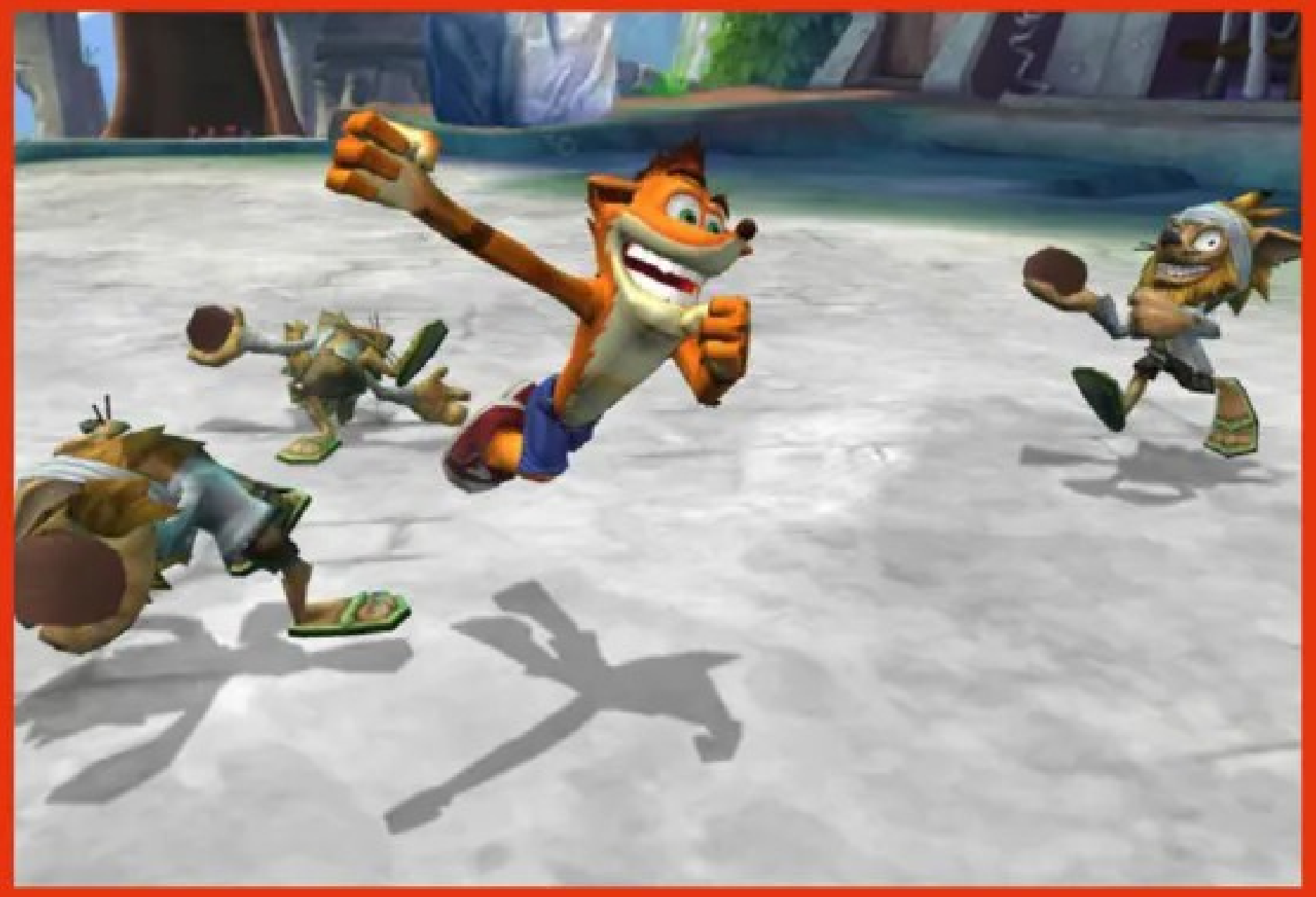
CRASH OF THE TITANS

Radical Entertainment was handed a mainline *Crash* title to tackle following *Tag Team Racing*, and the results are… ehhh. More emphasis was placed on combat, and it's generally not a bad game. Crash fatigue was setting in at this point, however, which didn't help.



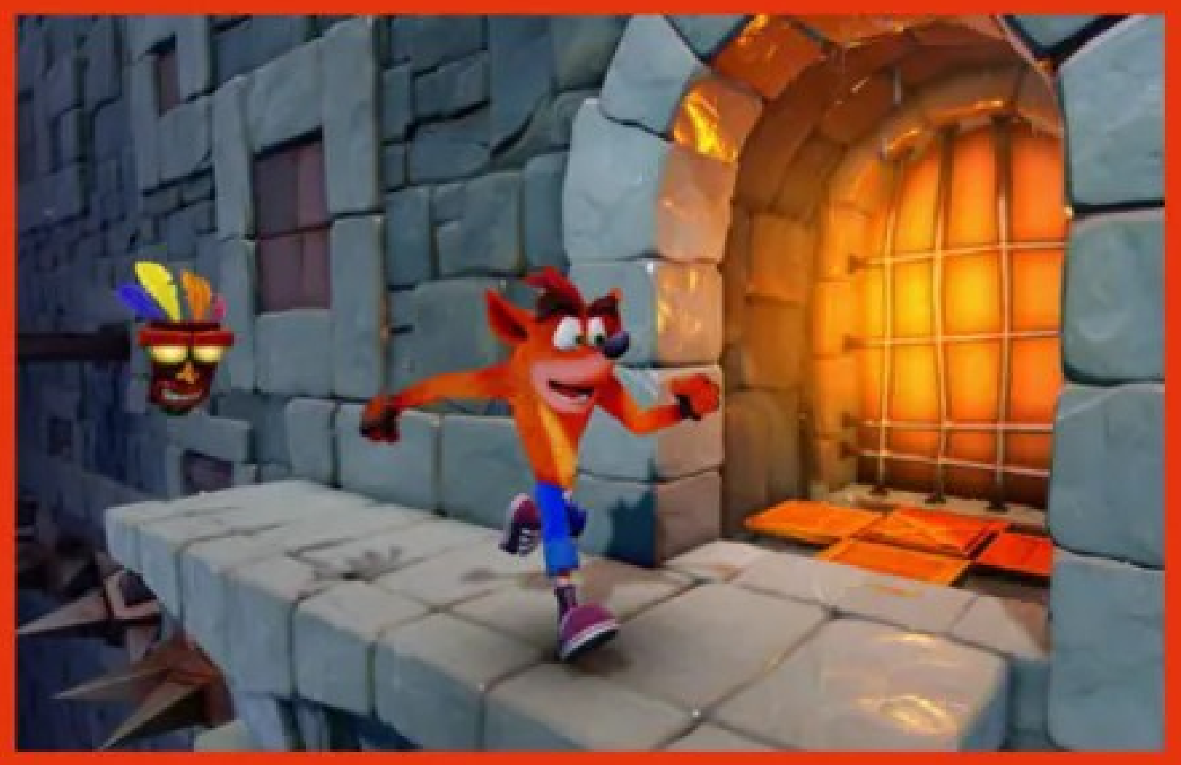
CRASH: MIND OVER MUTANT

Mind Over Mutant has the unfortunate legacy of putting the *Crash* series into a coma for almost a decade. This was another average-scoring effort from Radical Entertainment that again made the decision to put more emphasis on combat. A bad camera didn't win critics over to this one, however.



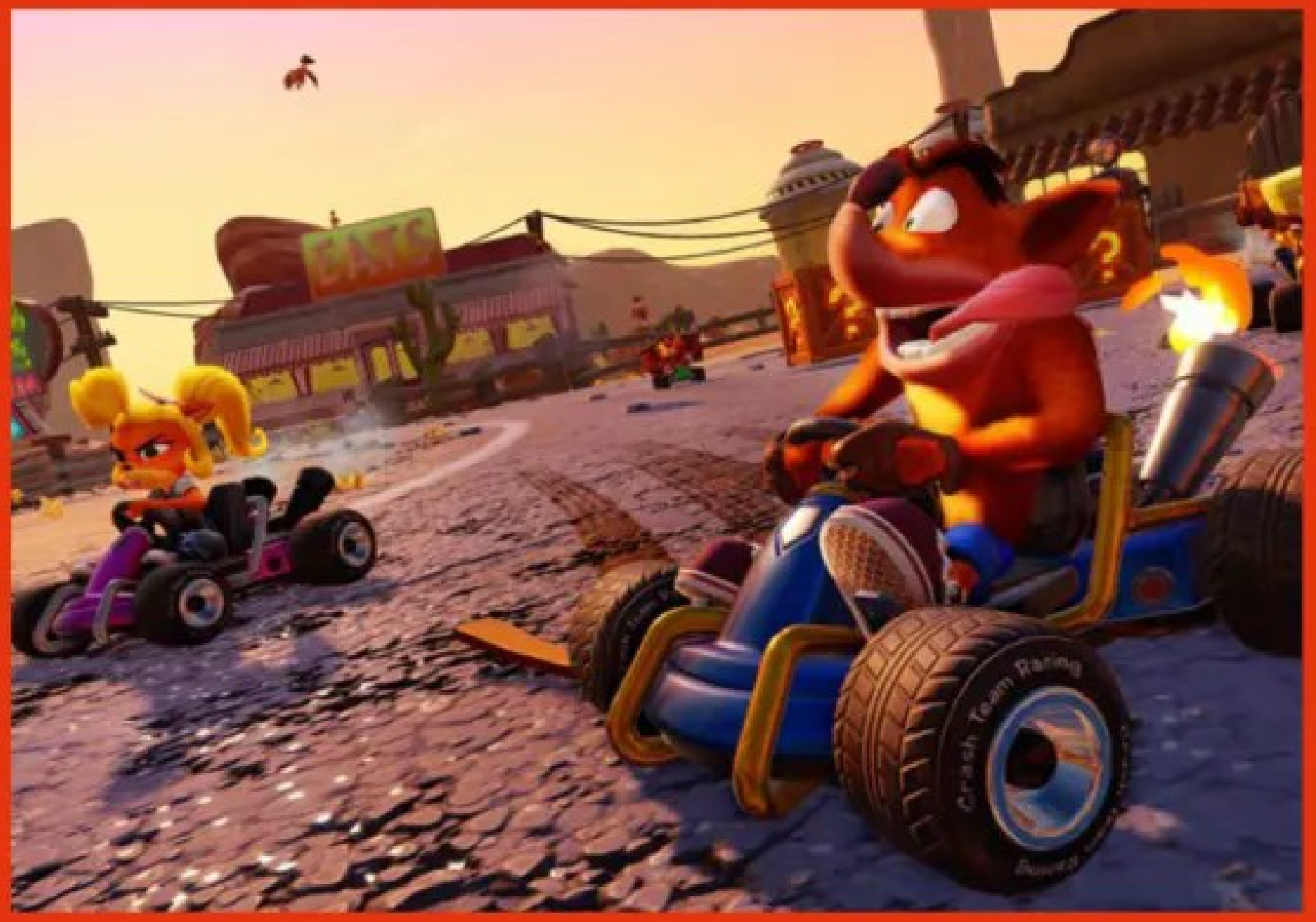
CRASH BANDICOOT N SANE TRILOGY

After a brief yet successful appearance in the *Skylanders* series, Crash had a tentative toe back into the gaming world. A year later, Vicarious Visions and Activision gave our hero a full shove into centre stage with this remaster of the original trilogy.



CRASH TEAM RACING NITRO FUELLED

Following on from *N Sane Trilogy*'s success, Beenox and Activision seeked to rekindle the love and nostalgia for Crash's karting side-hustle. This remastering and remixing of *Crash Team Racing* adds new elements that weren't present in the original game.



LARA CROFT

Toby Gard's female adventurer has gone on to become one of gaming's most iconic characters

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** LARA CROFT
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** TOMB RAIDER
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER
- » **FINEST HOUR:** TOMB RAIDER
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** EXPLORING

Probably the most celebrated videogame heroine ever created, Lara Croft has to be one of the most instantly recognisable gaming icons from a global perspective. She's appeared in 13 blockbuster console games since her debut in the original *Tomb Raider*, alongside a number of spinoff titles, showed up on countless magazine covers, in comics and energy drink adverts, and she's been played by two Oscar-winning actresses in three Hollywood movies. Not bad for a 23-year-old lass from Derby with a pair of well-travelled and slightly frayed khaki hotpants.

Created by British studio Core Design in 1996, Lara was envisioned as a strong, cool, self-reliant female character by her designer, Toby Gard, starting life as a South American called Laura Cruz before taking on the famous Croft moniker after a decision to make her back story more UK-oriented. This being the early days of full-on 3D gaming on Sega's Saturn, quickly followed by Sony's PlayStation console, it's probably fair to say that Lara's initial appearance was a little on the angular side. But what she lacked in polygons she made up for in the kind of athletic ability that wowed mid-Nineties gamers as she leaped, somersaulted, side-flipped and swan-dived around her environment like some sort of hybrid between a gold-medal winning Olympic gymnast and a spider monkey.

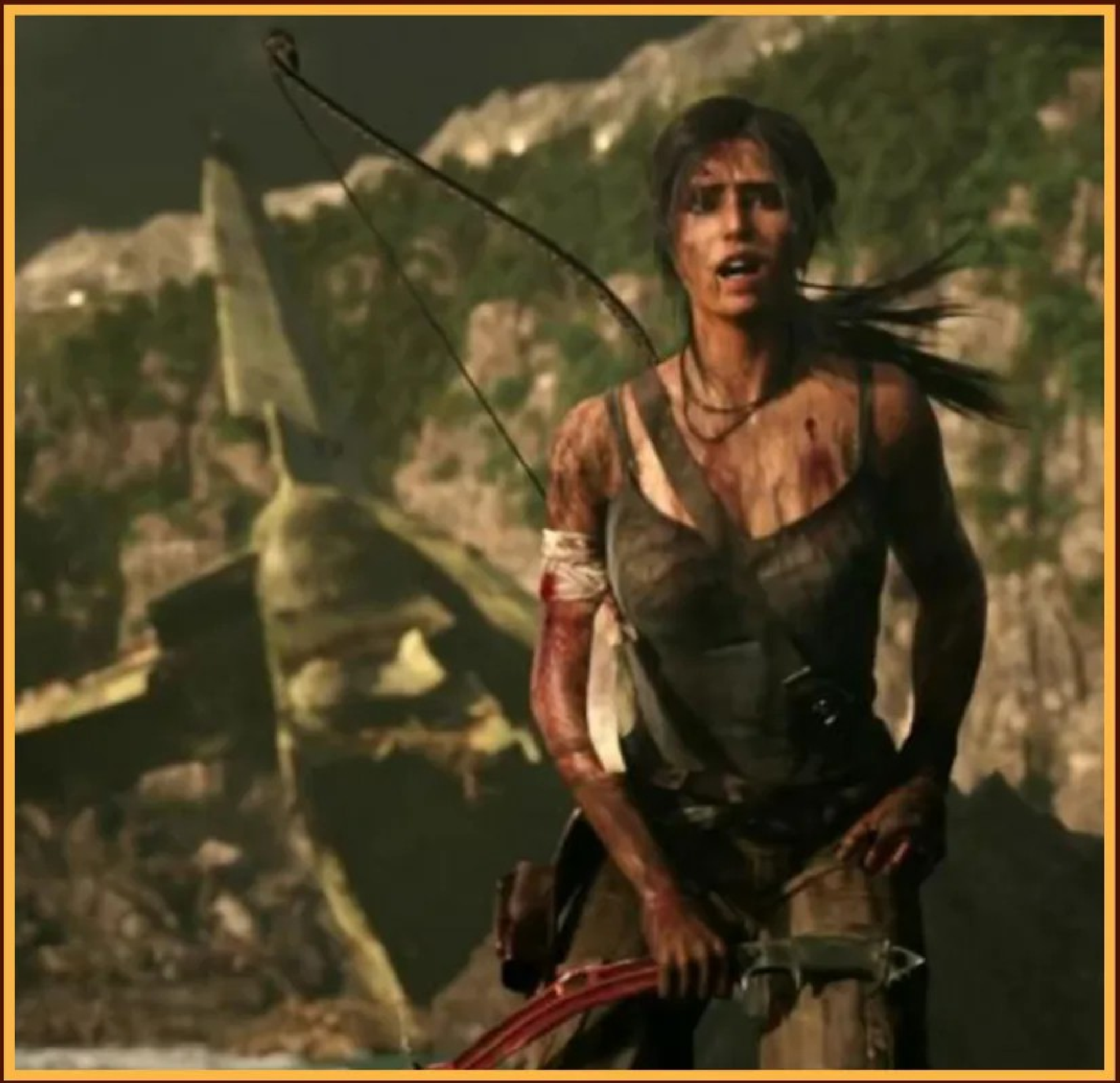
> **"Lara had been completely remodelled, and came with enhanced athleticism and combat abilities"**

And what environments they were, as Lara tackled huge caverns, giant waterfalls, trap-filled temple complexes and a whole lost hidden valley in South America before facing increasingly challenging trials in Greece, Egypt and finally the legendary Atlantis. All while battling the mysteriously hostile local wildlife, double-crossing human (and not so human) adversaries and the odd dinosaur. Lara's combat skills were pretty much on par with her dynamic tomb-negotiating, relying for much of the game on a pair of now-iconic pistols kept permanently holstered around her thighs, and the ability to back-flip merrily through most of her gunfights at no detriment to her aiming. But the overall *Tomb Raider* experience was mostly defined by the time players spent as a lone Lara simply mastering the terrain, tackling various puzzle sequences and wondering where to go next, and how to get there.

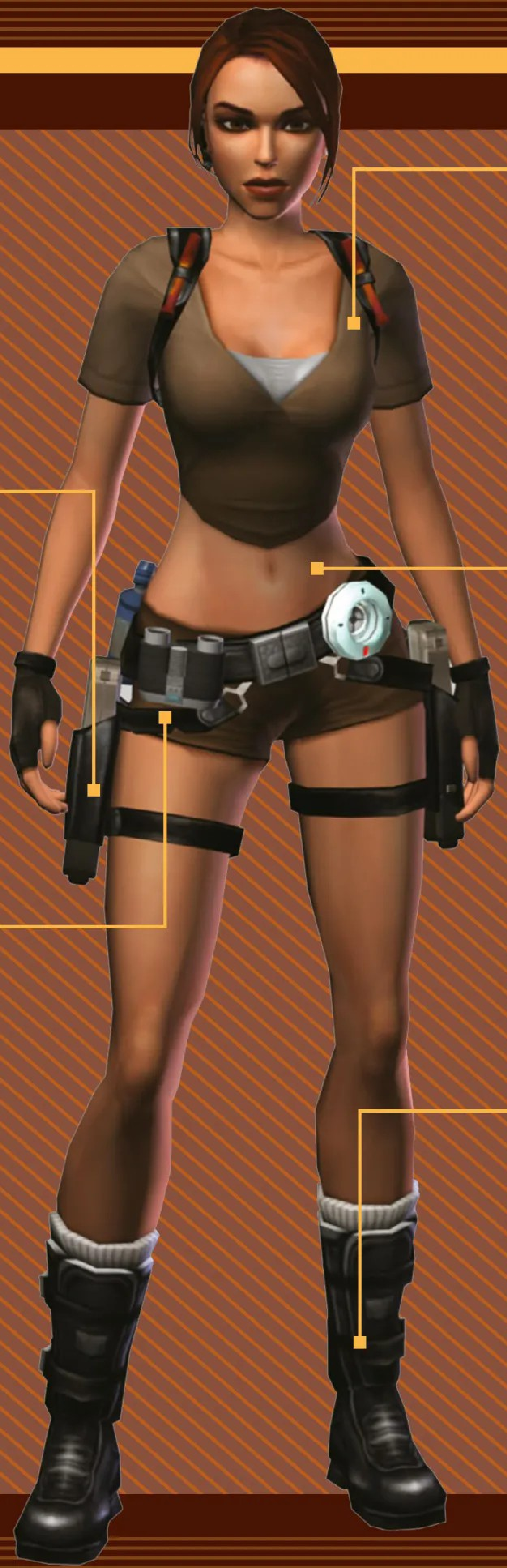
So successful was Lara's debut that Sony signed a deal with publisher Eidos for console exclusivity on the next two games, making Ms. Croft a poster child for the PlayStation generation and sending her on her way to becoming a cultural phenomenon. *Tomb Raider II* saw Lara return in more of an action-hero role, adding the ability to drive vehicles including boats and snowmobiles, and giving her a more varied set of outfits than the omnipresent turquoise tank top from the first game. Core produced a further four *Tomb Raider* games, and attempted to kill off Lara for good at the end of the fourth title, *Last Revelation*, a move unsurprisingly decried by fans. After an underwhelming journey through Lara's formative years in *Tomb Raider Chronicles*, which featured a teenaged version of our plucky heroine in pigtails, Core's final game in the franchise, *Angel Of Darkness*, flopped spectacularly. At a time when Lara's profile was at unprecedented levels worldwide thanks to two Angelina Jolie movies based on the character, she disappeared from the gaming radar for three years.

When the series returned, it was in the hands of a new studio, US-based Crystal Dynamics. For their next-generation take on the franchise, *Tomb Raider: Legend*, Lara had been completely remodelled, although remaining true to Toby Gard's original design in appearance, and came with enhanced athleticism and combat abilities, including a new grapple and rope swinging mechanic and a Matrix-style 'bullet time' feature. Legend also gave fans the chance to finally ride Lara's famous motorbike, rather than just watching her do so in cutscenes. This game was the first in a trilogy featuring a new story arc involving the search for Lara's mother. The trilogy also included *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*, a remake of Core's original *Tomb Raider* game highlighting arguably the franchise's best level design. Crystal Dynamics rounded off the triptych with the critically acclaimed and visually stunning *Tomb Raider Underworld*.

Square Enix took over the franchise in 2013, giving Crystal Dynamics the nod to reboot the series and bring us a younger, more vulnerable Lara, with a script from Rhianna Pratchett giving us a more concrete origin story for the character. Gone were the twin pistols and physics-defying leaps and somersaults, with new Lara favouring her climbing axe and more stealthy bow and arrow, *Hunger Games* style. The trilogy of games, *Tomb Raider*, *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* and *Shadow Of The Tomb Raider* chart Lara's ascendance to becoming the legendary icon that so enthralled a generation of fans for over two decades. And in the sad absence of Nathan Drake, we're crossing our fingers that like James Bond, Lara Croft will return. ✱



» The 2013 *Tomb Raider* reboot offered by far the most mature and cinematic treatment of the character to date, continuing through two further titles in the franchise.



OUTFIT

Our heroine has donned numerous outfits over the years, from combat and scuba gear to union jack T-shirts and full-length black dinner gowns. The costume most synonymous with Lara though has to be the figure-hugging turquoise tank top and tiny brown shorts combo first seen in the original *Tomb Raider.*

PISTOLS

Throughout most of the *Tomb Raider* series Lara has rarely been seen without her signature twin pistols – the bane of any endangered species of animal she happens to run into. Later games gave you the option of being able to stylishly take out two different enemies with them at the same time.

FIGURE

Lara's improbable figure has always been a controversial aspect of the character, starting out notoriously top-heavy in early games and sporting dubiously wide thighs, tiny arms and monster calf muscles. As the games progressed her body was made more realistic, albeit like that of an athletic supermodel.

BELT

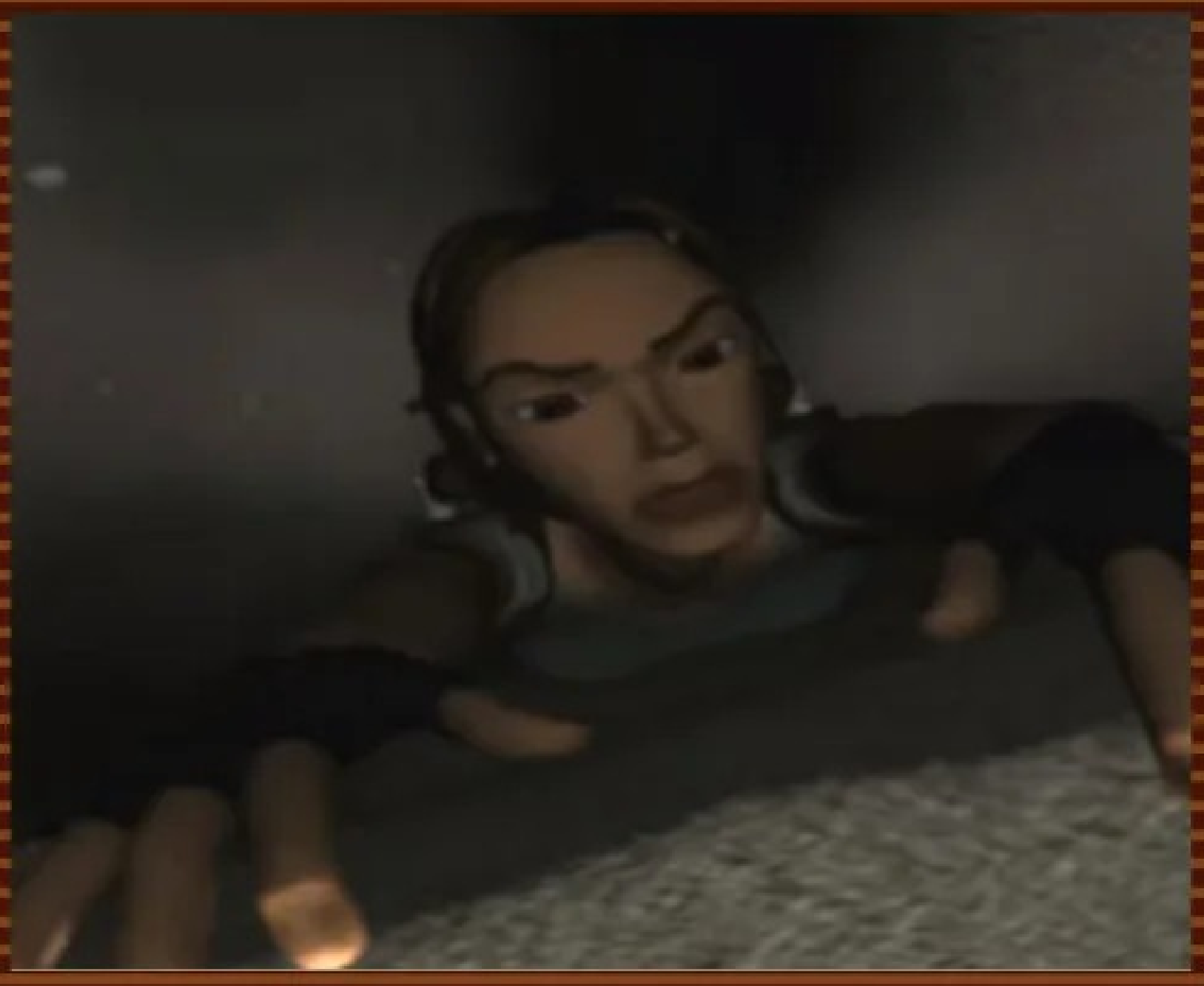
Like Batman, Lara has a love of a good-quality utility belt, with an ever-present leather number incorporating twin pistol holsters and, presumably, some sort of secret compartment for unlimited ammo. From *Tomb Raider: Legend* onwards it also included a handy extendable grappling hook, torch and binoculars.

BOOTS

Rounding off Lara's self-styled portable tomb-raiding kit are her chunky fur-lined hiking boots, black fingerless climbing gloves, a handy backpack for all the medikits she finds lying about, and a hairband for her ubiquitous ponytail, which Core made a big deal about animating from *Tomb Raider II* onwards.

> MAGIC MOMENTS

■ A T-Rex springing out of nowhere in the first *Tomb Raider* is still a terrifying gaming memory.



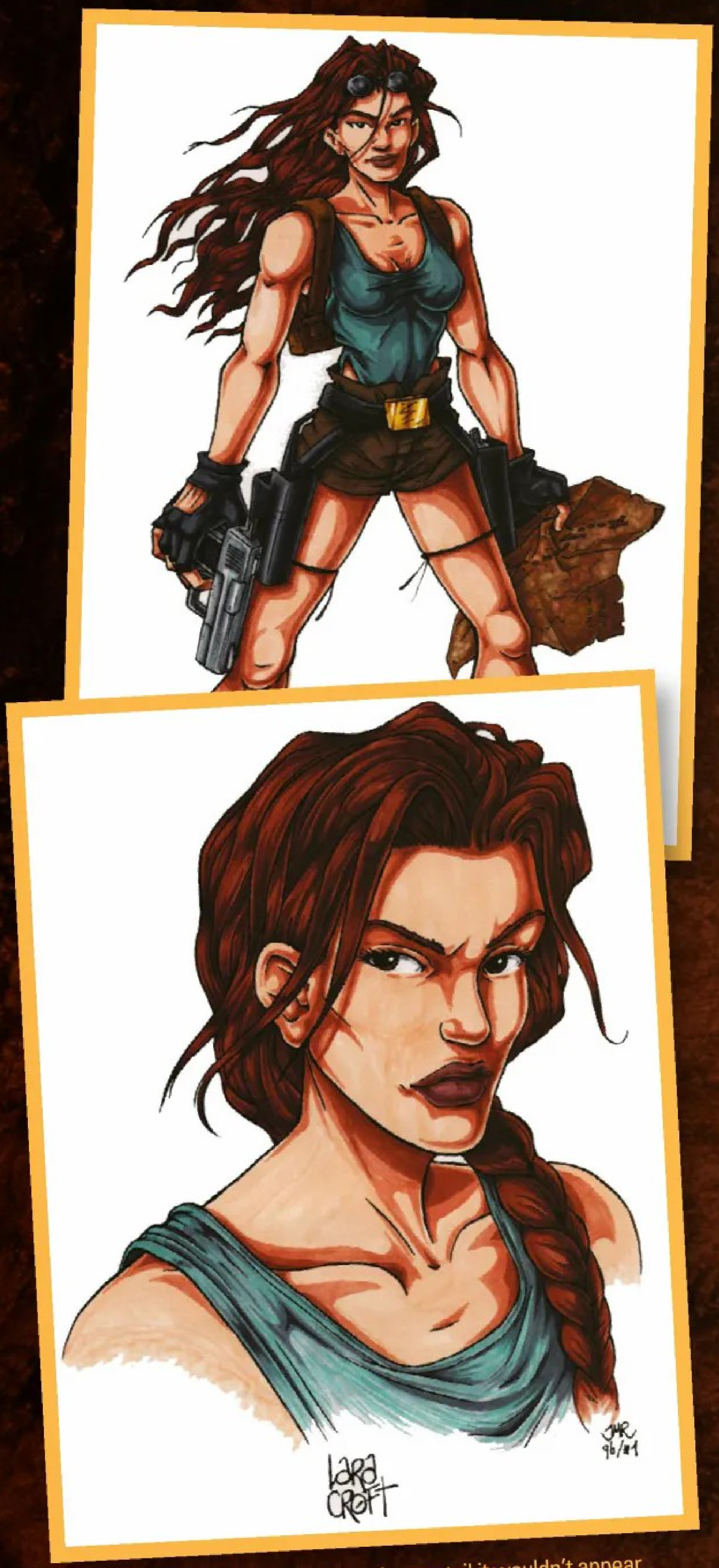
■ At the end of *The Last Revelation*, Lara messes up a jump and apparently falls to her death…

■ The 2001 movie starring Angelina Jolie brought Lara newfound mainstream popularity.

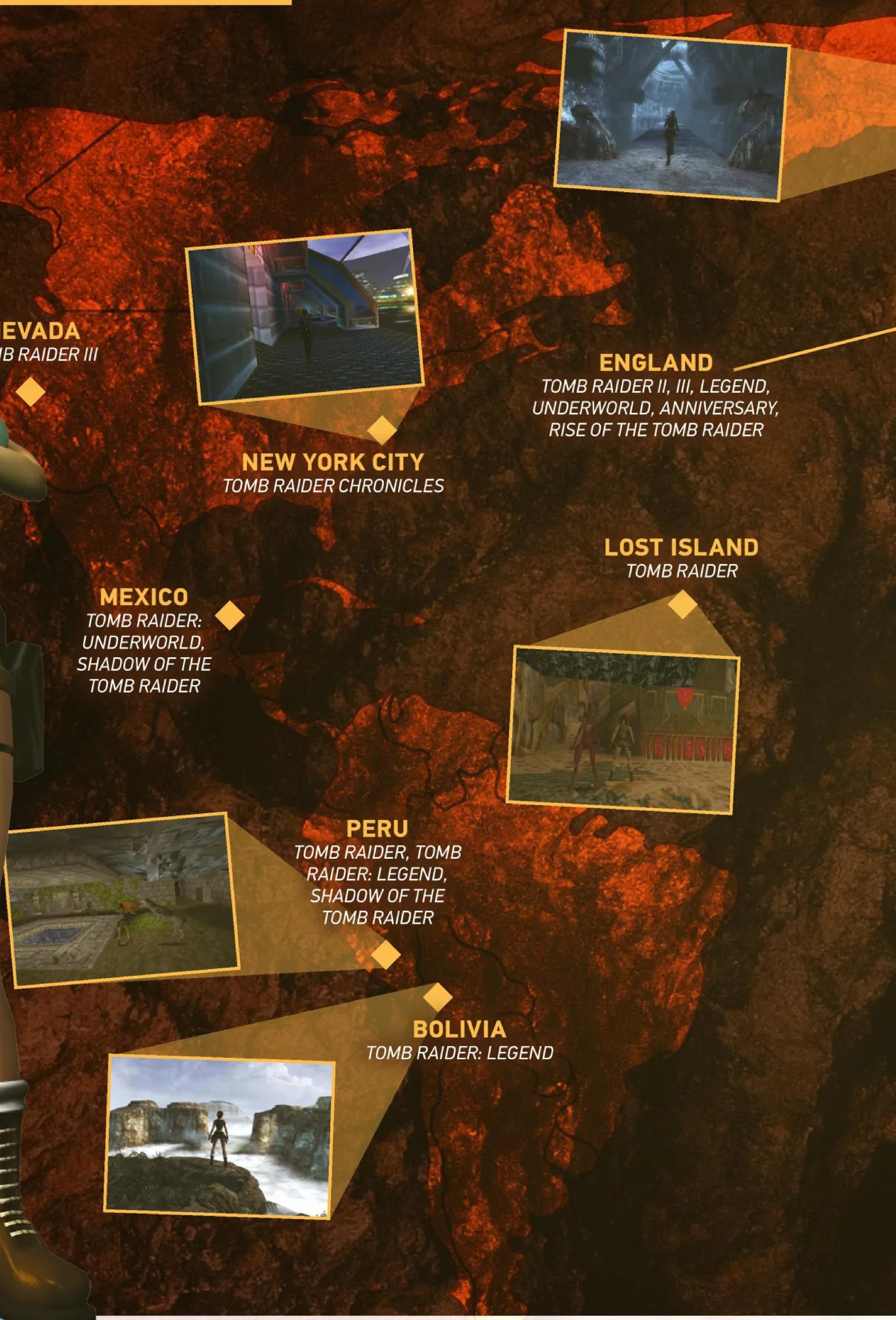
■ *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* gave fans the chance to return to remade stages from the first game.

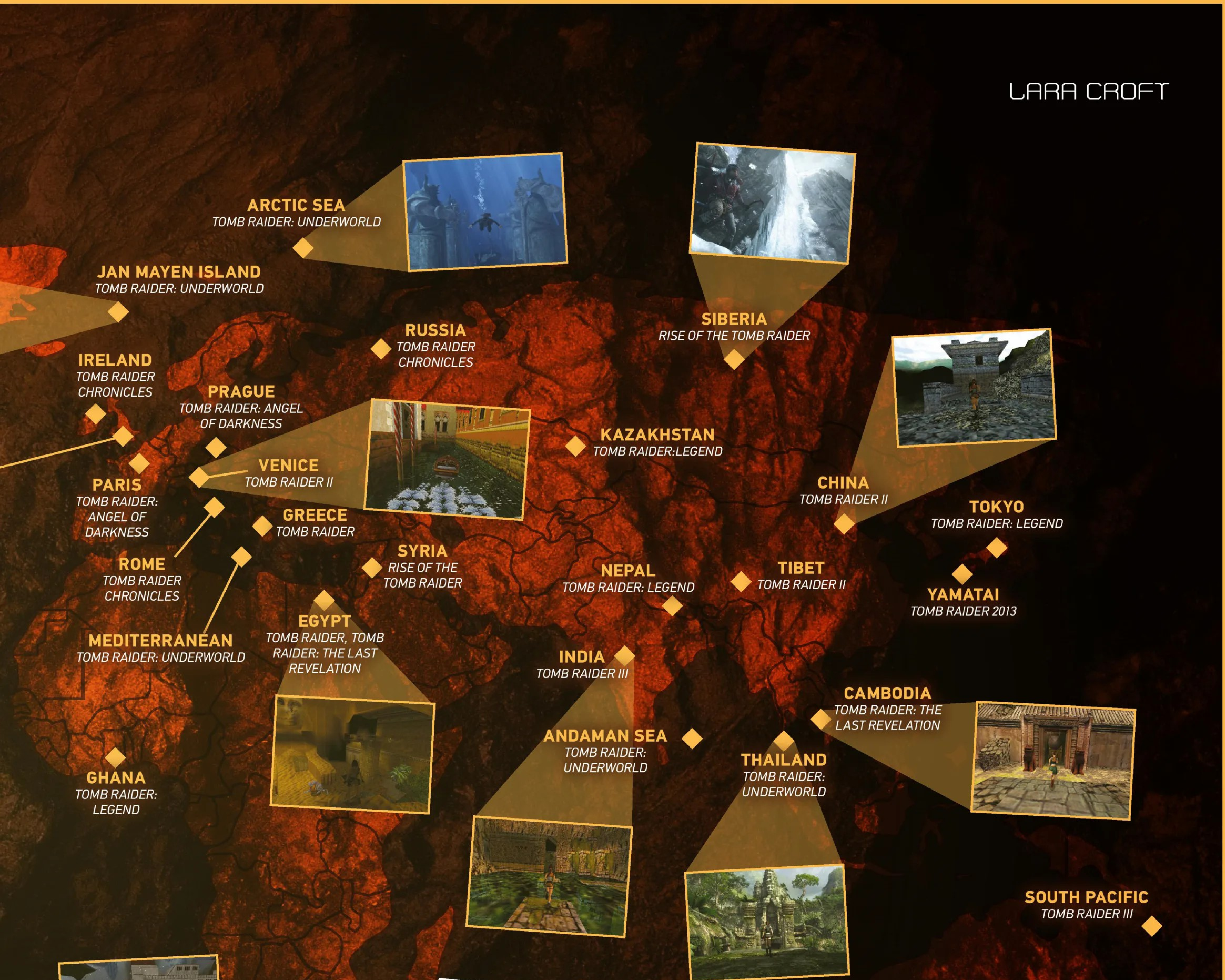
AROUND THE WORLD

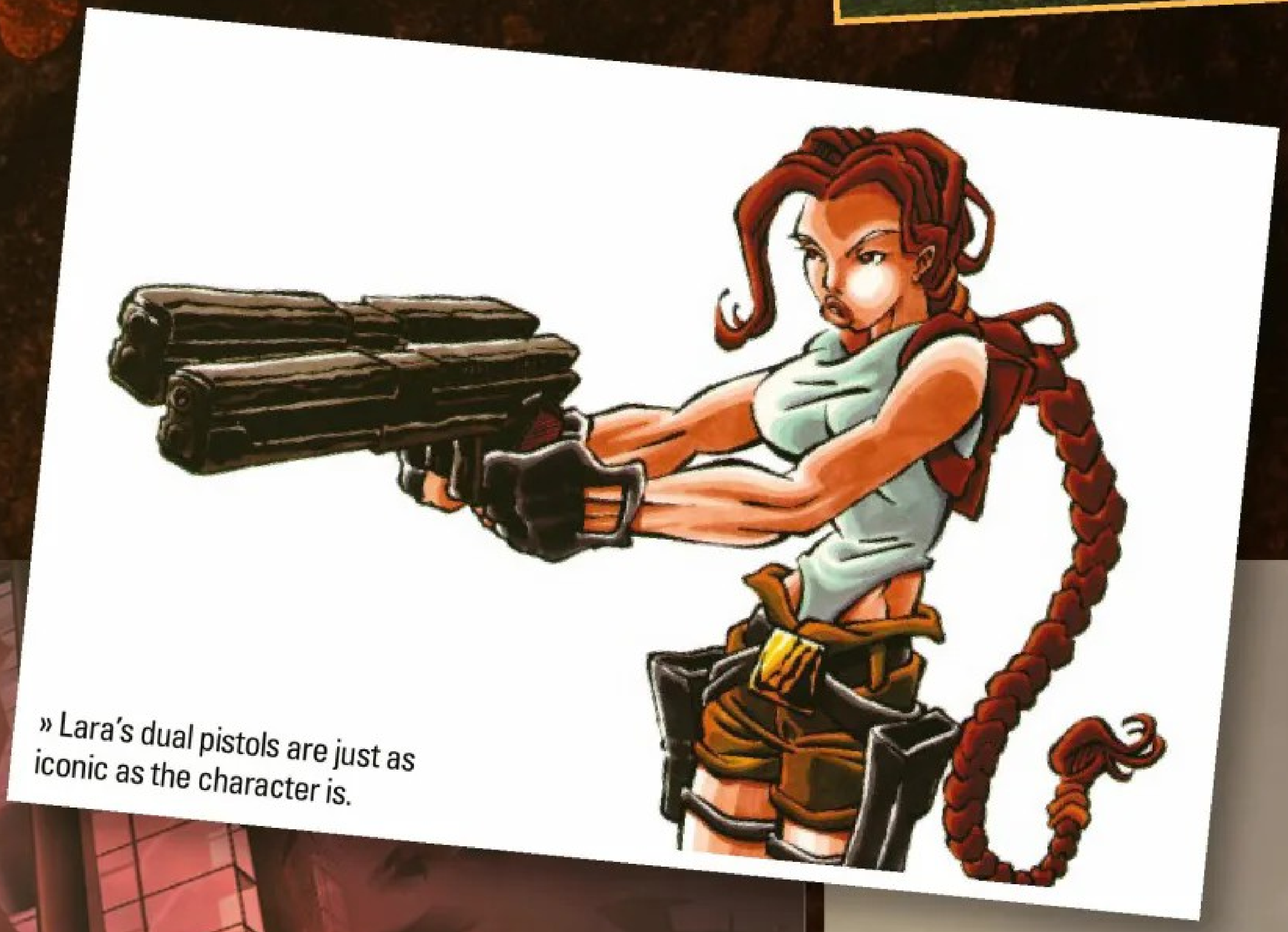
Then Tomb Raider games have taken place all over the world. How many of the following exotic locations do you remember?



» Although concept art showed Lara's ponytail it wouldn't appear in-game until *Tomb Raider II*.


NEVADA
TOMB RAIDER III
NEW YORK CITY
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES
ENGLAND
TOMB RAIDER II, III, LEGEND, UNDERWORLD, ANNIVERSARY, RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER
LOST ISLAND
TOMB RAIDER
MEXICO
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD, SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER
PERU
TOMB RAIDER, TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND, SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER
BOLIVIA
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

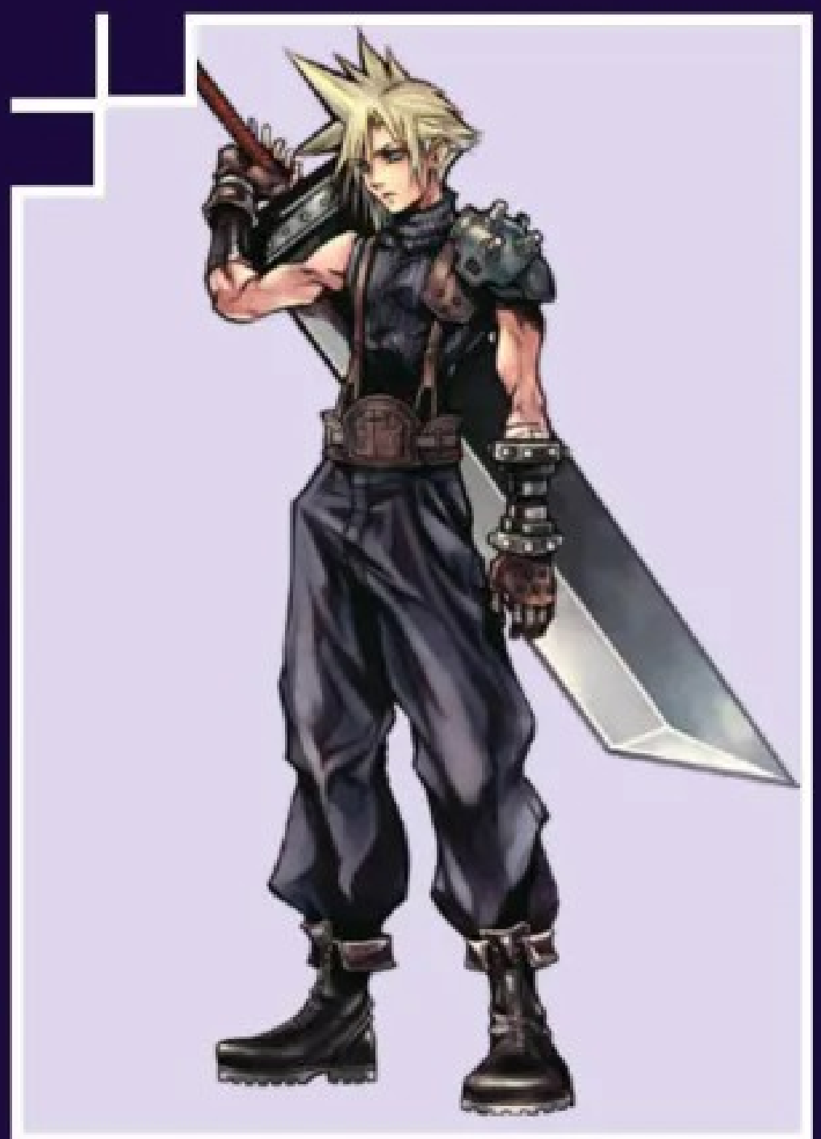

ARCTIC SEA
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD
JAN MAYEN ISLAND
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD
SIBERIA
RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER
RUSSIA
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES
IRELAND
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES
PRAGUE
TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS
KAZAKHSTAN
TOMB RAIDER:LEGEND
VENICE
TOMB RAIDER II
PARIS
TOMB RAIDER: ANGEL OF DARKNESS
CHINA
TOMB RAIDER II
TOKYO
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
GREECE
TOMB RAIDER
SYRIA
RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER
ROME
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES
NEPAL
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
TIBET
TOMB RAIDER II
YAMATAI
TOMB RAIDER 2013
MEDITERRANEAN
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD
EGYPT
TOMB RAIDER, TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION
INDIA
TOMB RAIDER III
CAMBODIA
TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION
ANDAMAN SEA
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD
THAILAND
TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD
GHANA
TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND
SOUTH PACIFIC
TOMB RAIDER III
ANTARCTICA
TOMB RAIDER III



» Lara's dual pistols are just as iconic as the character is.

CLOUD STRIFE

This spikey-haired hero ushered in a new era for both Final Fantasy and the JRPG genre



ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** CLOUD STRIFE
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** FINAL FANTASY VII
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE
- » **FINEST HOUR:** FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** GIANT SWORDS

For the first decade of its lifespan, the *Final Fantasy* series enjoyed a healthy residency on Nintendo's first two home consoles, the NES and SNES. This era for the JRPG series leant heavily into fantasy tropes: magic crystals, noble Warriors Of Light and clear-cut evil emperors. Typically the heroes were sword-wielding paladins, rangers or brave doers of good, and the worlds they inhibited would be medieval-like realms not too dissimilar from your typical fantasy novel. *Final Fantasy VI* veered into the world of steampunk, where magic and machinery clashed against each other, creating a new type of world for the series, paving the way for what was to come next. By the time *Final Fantasy VII* was in the works, developer Square decided to jump ship from Nintendo and instead develop the game for Sony's PlayStation.

This console courted a new audience: an older, more 'cool' demographic. Square saw this as an opportunity to shift *Final Fantasy* in a new direction, less *Lord Of The Rings* and more *Akira*. *Final Fantasy VII* was to be darker, more moody and, above all, futuristic, and Square needed a main character to capture that new feeling. They wanted someone complex, but also iconic and with a rock-solid visual design you could pick out from a silhouette, and they came up with Cloud Strife.

At face value, Cloud is a typical hero. He's garbed in a military jumpsuit, the uniform of the Shinra Corporation's elite fighting force, SOLDIER; he's conventionally attractive, with piercing green eyes and a hairstyle you'd typically find in Japanese manga or anime; and he wields a gigantic sword to fight off whatever is thrown at him. However, each of these visual traits hide a deeper meaning, hinting at the complex character underneath. The uniform represents Cloud's denial, that what he *thinks* he is isn't necessarily true. His green eyes are a symptom of the experimentation and torture he endured during the years prior to the events of *Final Fantasy VII*. And his Buster Sword is a symbol of a promise made to an old mentor and friend, but one that's been ultimately forgotten, hidden under Cloud's many levels of guilt.

When we first meet Cloud, he's aloof and uncaring. However, through interaction with party members Barret and Tifa, we soon learn that not everything is as it seems. Tifa grew up with Cloud in his hometown of Nibelheim, and is taken aback when Cloud portrays himself as an unflinching mercenary. In a 2003 interview with *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, *FFVII* director and scenario writer Yoshinori Kitase said, "He isn't a straightforward hero like Superman; he has many mysteries, self-doubts, and a real dark side. [Tetsuya] Nomura [character designer] was also very good at designing a character like that."

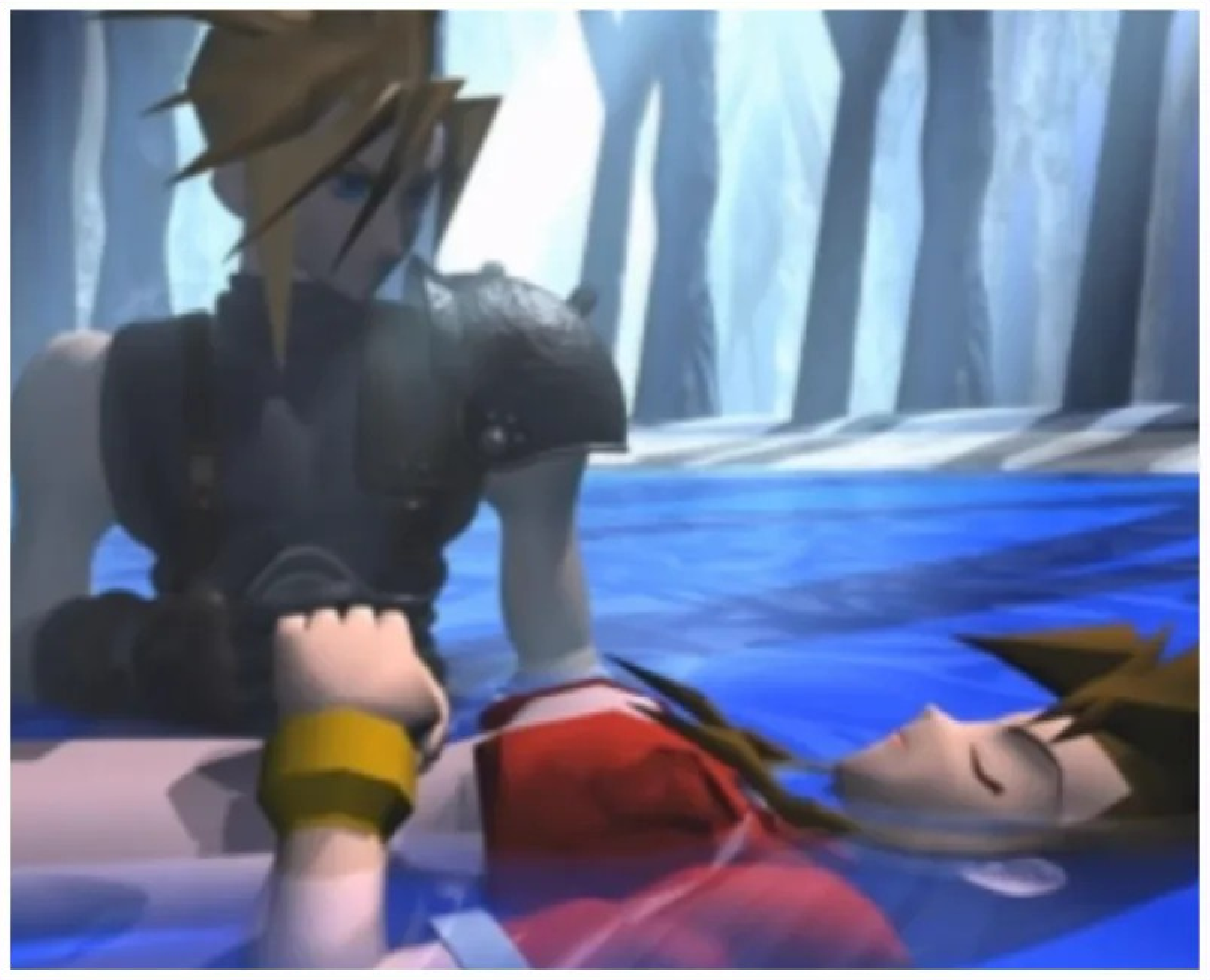
Cloud's character arc in *Final Fantasy VII* is about learning who he really is, and how the traumatic events that led him to adopt his mercenary persona tie into *FFVII*'s wider story. By the end of the game he's self-assured and knows what he wants, and he transforms from being self-absorbed to doubtful of himself, to a complete vegetable, to finally the selfless hero who saves the planet from certain destruction.

The character clearly resonated with the gaming audience, and Cloud frequently tops 'Best *Final Fantasy* Character' listicles on the likes of IGN. His journey of self-discovery is something we can all identify with, and perhaps this is one of the reasons he became so beloved with gamers. Following the runaway success of *Final Fantasy VII*, Cloud became an icon. This has seen him appear in a series of spin-off appearances, from 2002's Disney crossover *Kingdom Hearts*, to 2014's *Smash Bros* games for Wii U and 3DS. The character has also appeared in the wider *FFVII* canon, notably in the sequel movie *Advent Children* and PSP prequel *Crisis Core*.

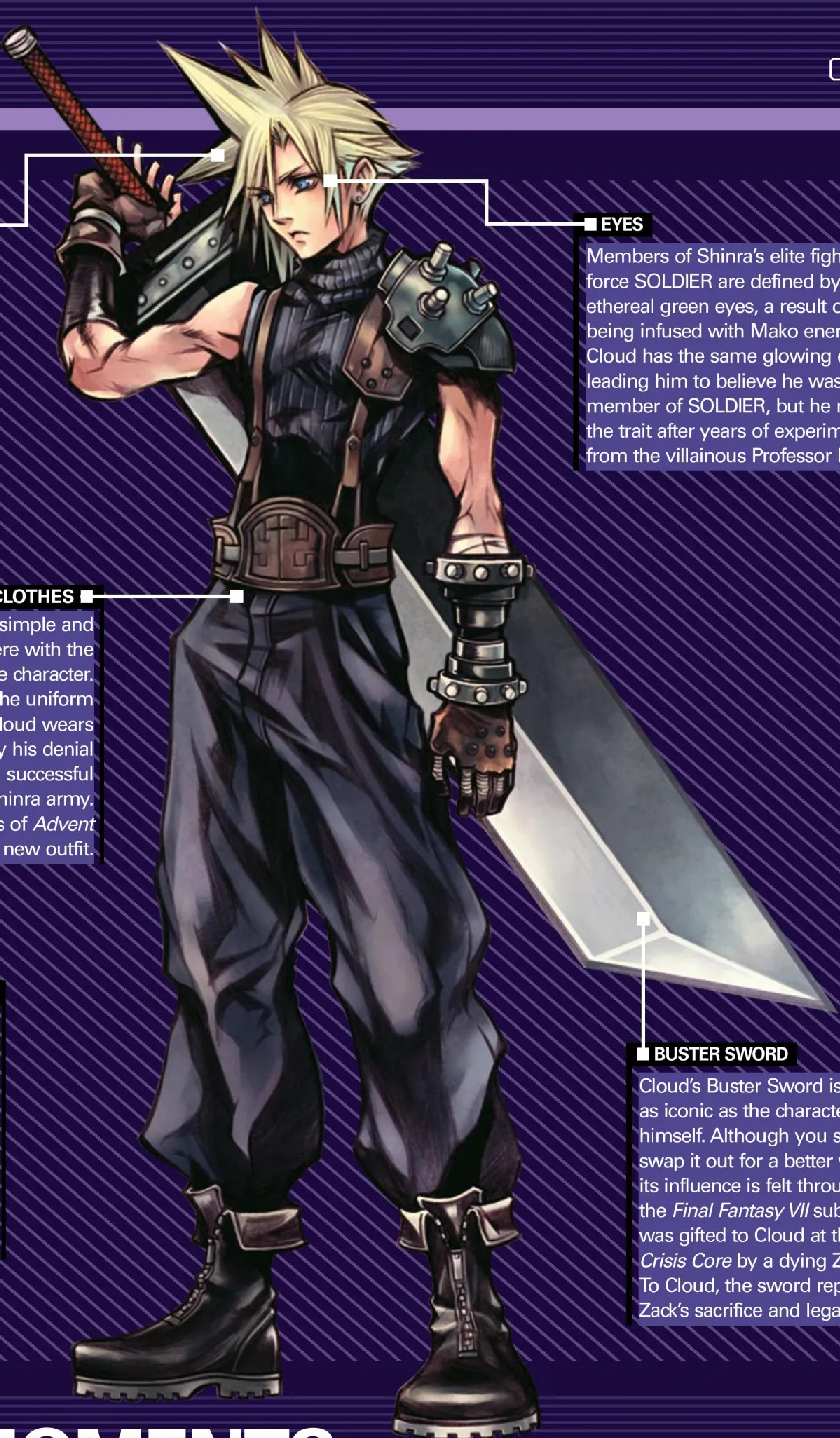
> "Cloud's journey of self-discovery is something we can all identify with"

Cloud's influence can still be felt in *Final Fantasy* today, so far that the series has struggled to step out of his shadow. Square Enix tried to replicate his success by creating a female version of the character, Lightning, for *Final Fantasy XIII*, to somewhat moderate success, and you can also see another, not-so-successful attempted clone job in *Final Fantasy XV*'s hero, Noctis.

Outside of the odd spin-off appearance in recent years, we haven't seen much of Cloud, but we'll be having a full reunion with the character imminently. Square Enix is at work on a *Final Fantasy VII* remake, following a lengthy and vocal fan campaign to get it off the ground. It's clear JRPGs wouldn't be where they are without this spikey-haired Buster Sword-wielding juggernaut of a character, and even if he forgets who he really is in *Final Fantasy VII*, we're sure that popular culture will never, ever let Cloud fall into obscurity. ✱



■ The AVALANCHE crew suffers an unimaginable loss in the City Of The Ancients, and Cloud in particular takes it pretty hard.



HAIR

No amount of hair product can replicate Cloud's outlandish, but equally as amazing, style. Such is the manga-like hairstyle's popularity, it kicked off a trend for subsequent *Final Fantasy* games where each protagonist would have some variation of the spiky (and realistically unobtainable) hairdo.

EYES

Members of Shinra's elite fighting force SOLDIER are defined by their ethereal green eyes, a result of them being infused with Mako energy. Cloud has the same glowing eyes, leading him to believe he was a member of SOLDIER, but he received the trait after years of experimentation from the villainous Professor Hojo.

CLOTHES

Cloud's outfit is simple and doesn't interfere with the overall design of the character. The jumpsuit is the uniform of SOLDIER, and Cloud wears it to further portray his denial that he used to be a successful member in the Shinra army. During the events of *Advent Children* he wears a new outfit.

CHARACTER

Looking at it today, Cloud's personality was a double-edged sword. On the one hand his amnesia dovetails nicely into the story of *Final Fantasy VII*, but on the other hand it solidified a trope where seemingly every JRPG protagonist now has to be moody and have a mysterious past.

BUSTER SWORD

Cloud's Buster Sword is almost as iconic as the character himself. Although you soon swap it out for a better weapon, its influence is felt throughout the *Final Fantasy VII* subseries. It was gifted to Cloud at the end of *Crisis Core* by a dying Zack Fair. To Cloud, the sword represents Zack's sacrifice and legacy.

> MAGIC MOMENTS

■ Tragedy strikes as Sephiroth, Cloud's comrade, falls into madness and burns the town down.

"There ain't no gettin' offa this train!"
"There ain't no gettin' offa this train!"
"There ain't no gettin' offa this train!"

■ Cloud decides to put everything on the line and face off with Sephiroth once and for all.

NAME
Cloud
Tifa
Vincent
LIMIT LEVEL4
Chaos
Summon
Item
HP
MP
LIMIT
WAIT
892
795
3638/3638
875

■ Cloud beats the seven hells into Sephiroth with a final Omnislash Limit Break.

■ At E3 2015 the *FFVII* remake is announced, heralding Cloud's long-awaited return.

BREAKING THE LIMIT

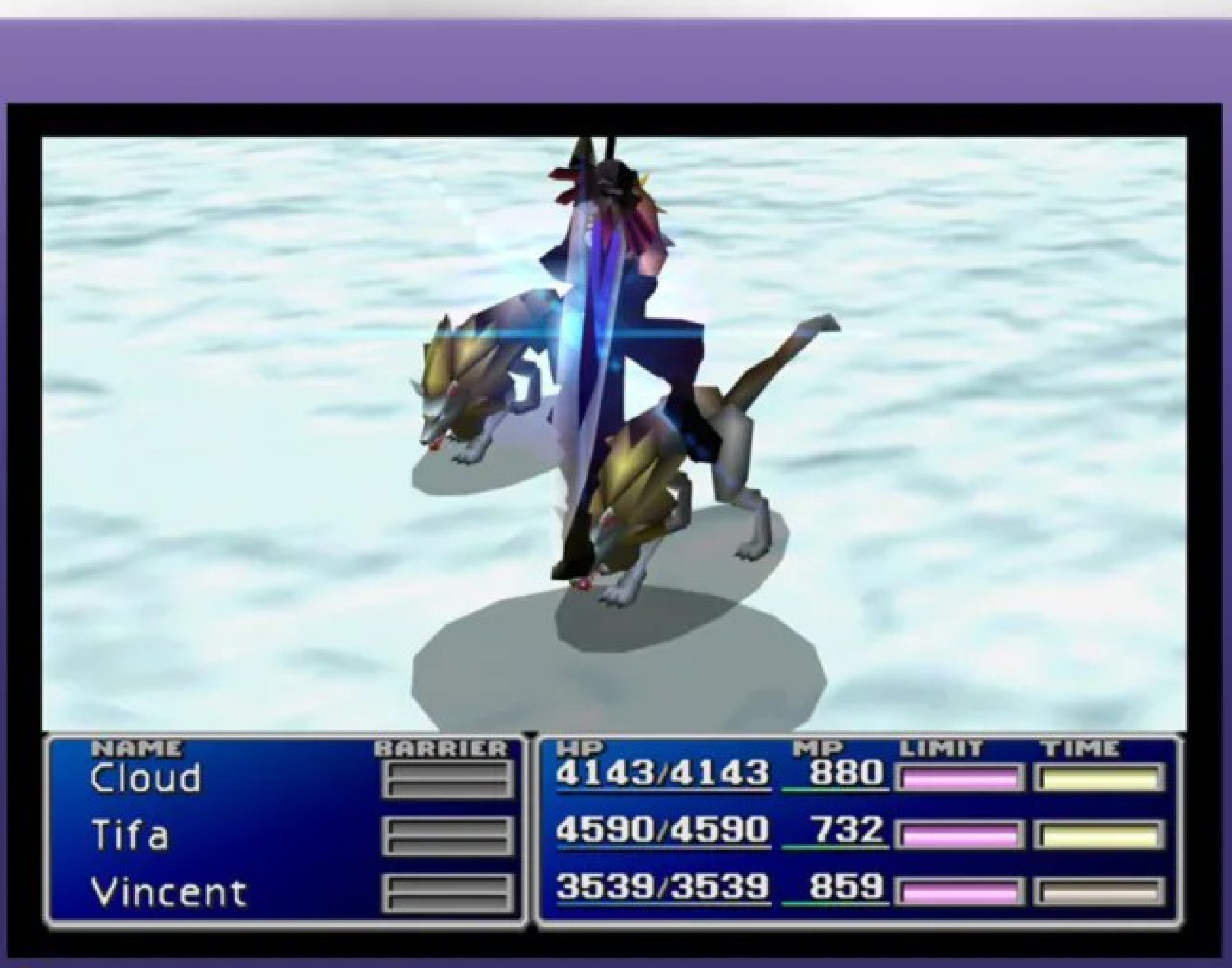
DISCOVER CLOUD'S ARSENAL OF POWERFUL LIMIT BREAK MOVES THAT HE HAS AT HIS DISPOSAL, AND HOW TO UNLOCK THEM THROUGHOUT THE GAME

BRAVER

HOW YOU GET IT
This one's easy: you start off with it.

WHAT IT DOES
Braver's your standard meat-and-potatoes damage-dealing Limit Break. Cloud strikes a pose, runs at his enemy and delivers a jumping cleave. It deals a good damage, but you won't be using it for very long.

WHAT IT'S USEFUL FOR
The opening Bombing Mission sequence had a couple of tough fights for beginners, notably the Scorpion, so make sure to have it ready for the handful of boss battles.

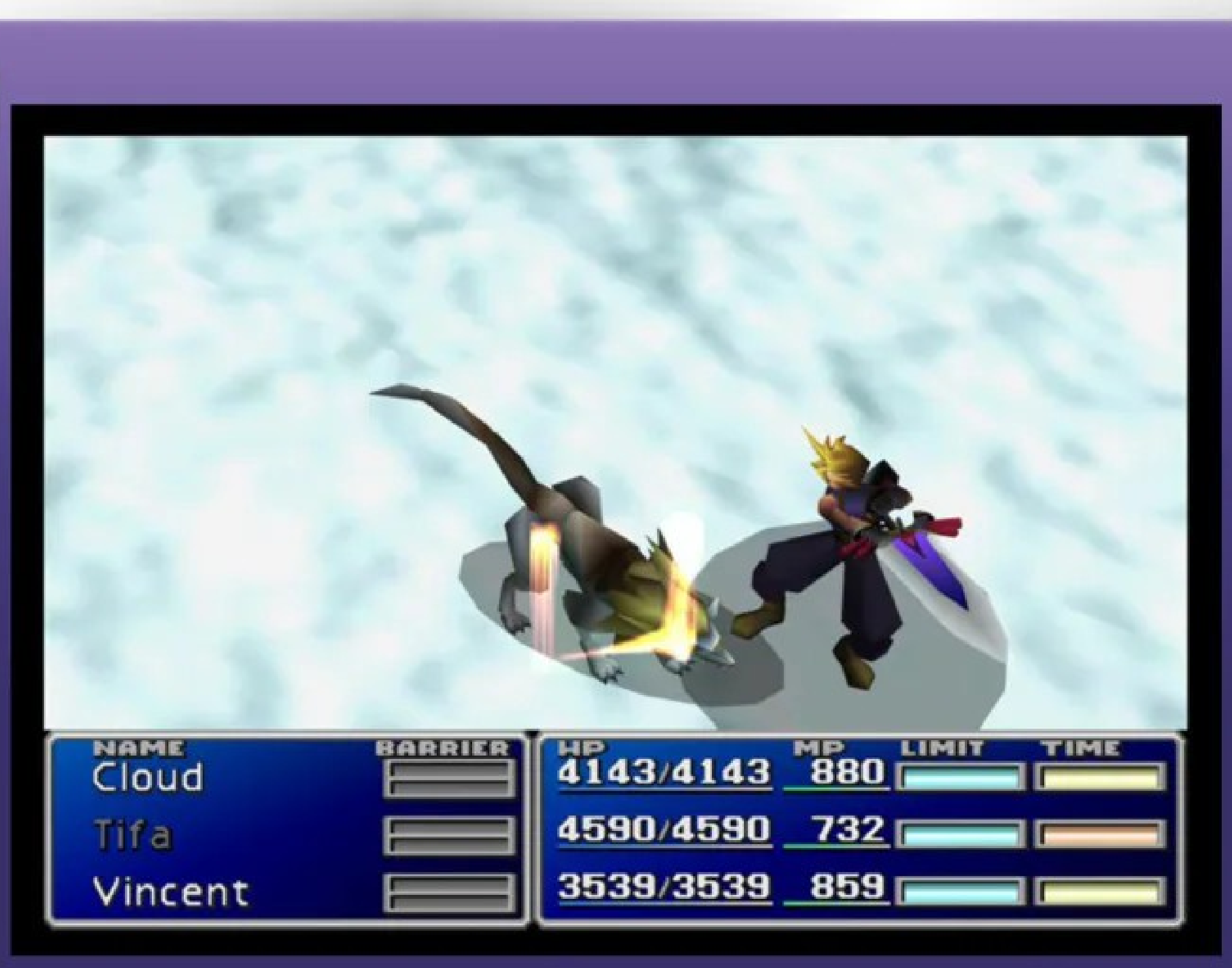

NAME
BARRIER
HP
MP
LIMIT
TIME
Cloud 4143/4143 880
Tifa 4590/4590 732
Vincent 3539/3539 859

CROSS SLASH

HOW YOU GET IT
Use Braver eight times in battle to unlock this one.

WHAT IT DOES
Cloud dashes forward and unleashes a series of slow blade strikes on an enemy, also forming the Japanese Kanji character for 'bane' or 'wicked'. This deals a little more damage than Braver and also has the chance to paralyse your opponent.

WHAT IT'S USEFUL FOR
You should have this Limit Break while still in Midgar, so it'll be a lot more useful than Braver during that sequence's set pieces, such as the showdown with Rufus Shinra.

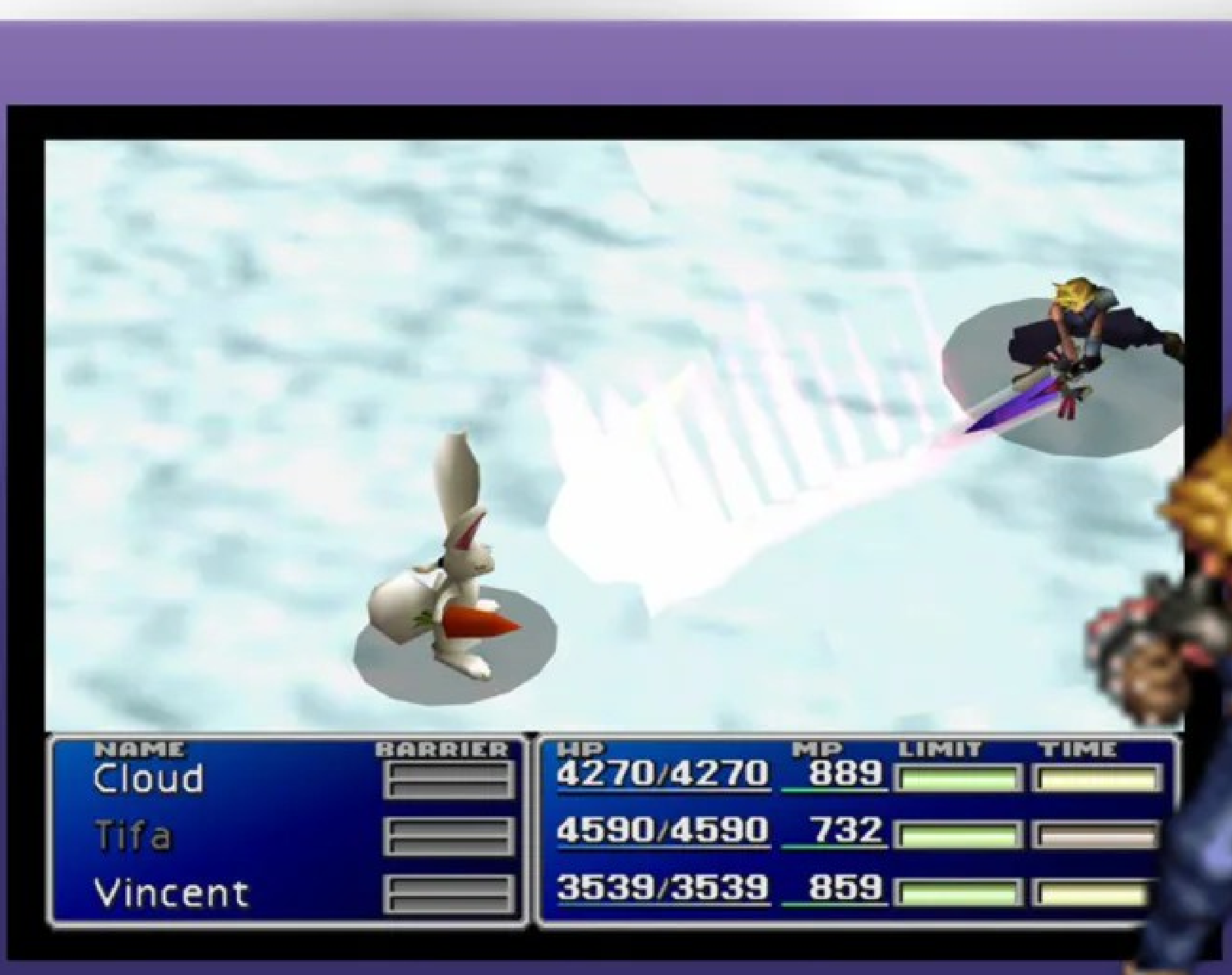

NAME
BARRIER
HP
MP
LIMIT
TIME
Cloud 4143/4143 880
Tifa 4590/4590 732
Vincent 3539/3539 859

BLADE BEAM

HOW YOU GET IT
This is a Level 2 Limit Break, and you'll have Cloud kill 120 enemies to obtain it.

WHAT IT DOES
Blade Beam is the first of Cloud's Limit Breaks that hits *multiple* foes. He swings his Buster Sword behind him and slams it down onto the floor, summoning a beam of energy that hits one enemy, which then breaks off to hit others.

WHAT IT'S USEFUL FOR
Generally, any battle that has multiple enemies. The first hit does more damage then either Braver or Cross Slash, so it's useful for bosses and other single-monster battles too.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Tifa 4590/4590 732
Vincent 3539/3539 859

CLIMHAZZARD

HOW YOU GET IT

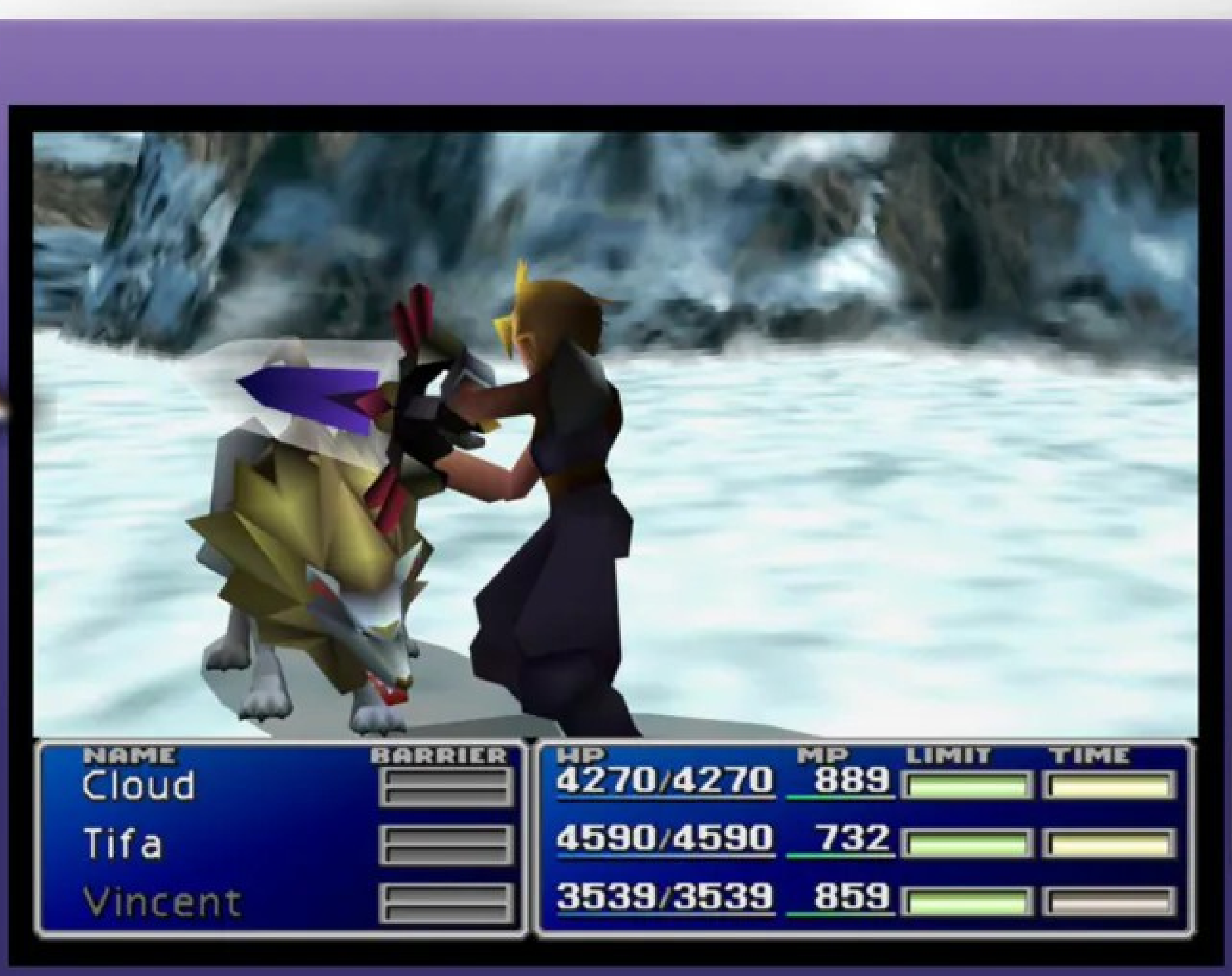
Use Blade Beam seven times in battle to grab this one.

WHAT IT DOES

This is sort of like a reverse Braver. Cloud poses, dashes forward to his quarry, stabs it and leaps high up into the air, dealing the hapless creature a hefty amount of damage.

WHAT IT'S USEFUL FOR

This hits harder than Blade Beam, so it should be your go-to Limit Break for any tough enemies you find out in the world. That said, keep in mind that Blade Beam hits multiple enemies.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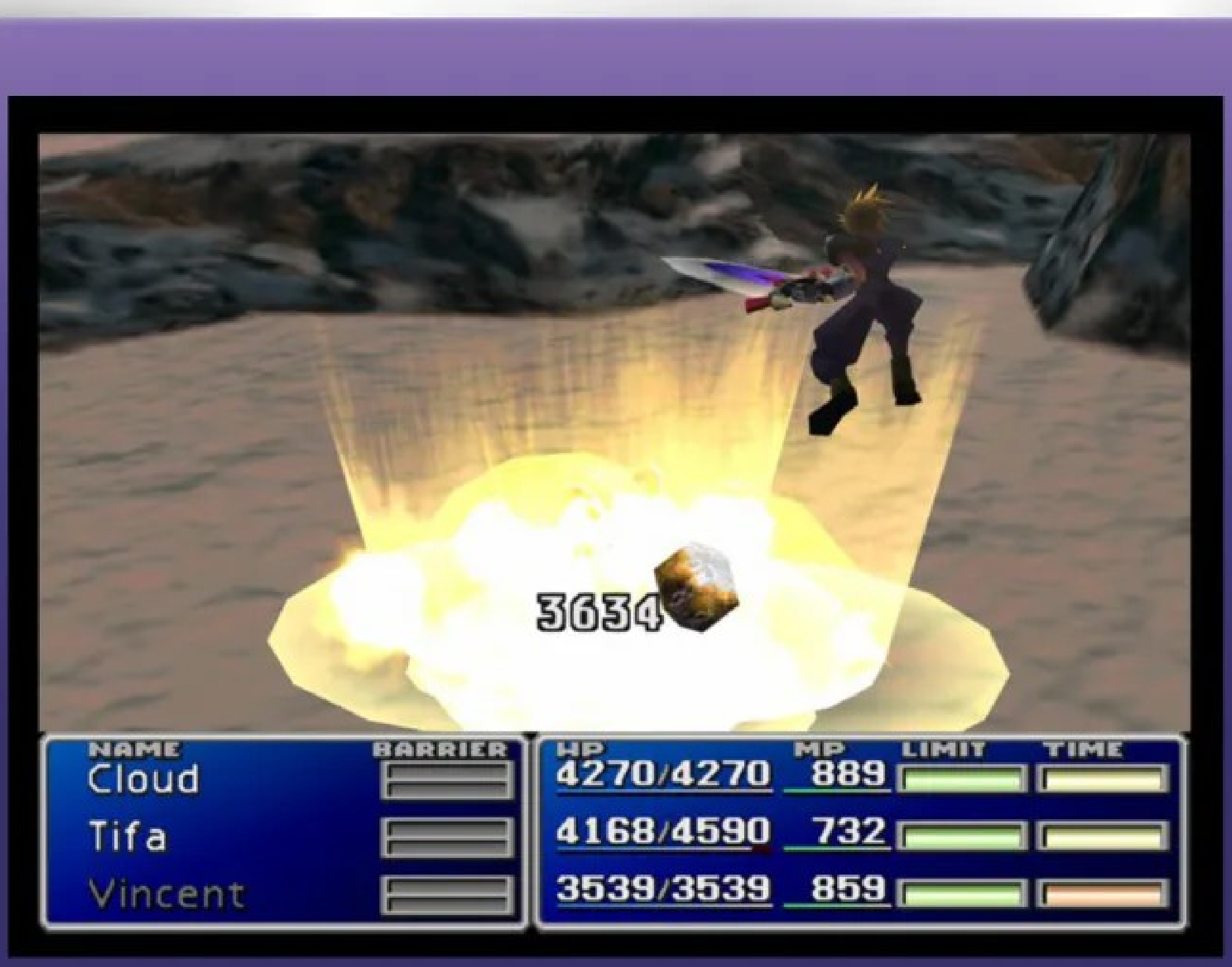
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BARRIER
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Tifa 4168/4590 732
Vincent 3539/3539 859

METEORAIN

HOW YOU GET IT

Slay 200 enemies – this counter starts after you obtain Blade Beam.

WHAT IT DOES

Another multiple-enemy Limit Break. Cloud leaps into the air and launches six mini meteors at a random selection of monsters. Each does about 1.5 times the damage of a normal attack.

WHAT IT'S USEFUL FOR

The randomised nature makes it a little difficult for fights with multiple enemies. For single-foe battles, however, this is a damage-dealer and a half.

FINAL TOUCH

HOW YOU GET IT

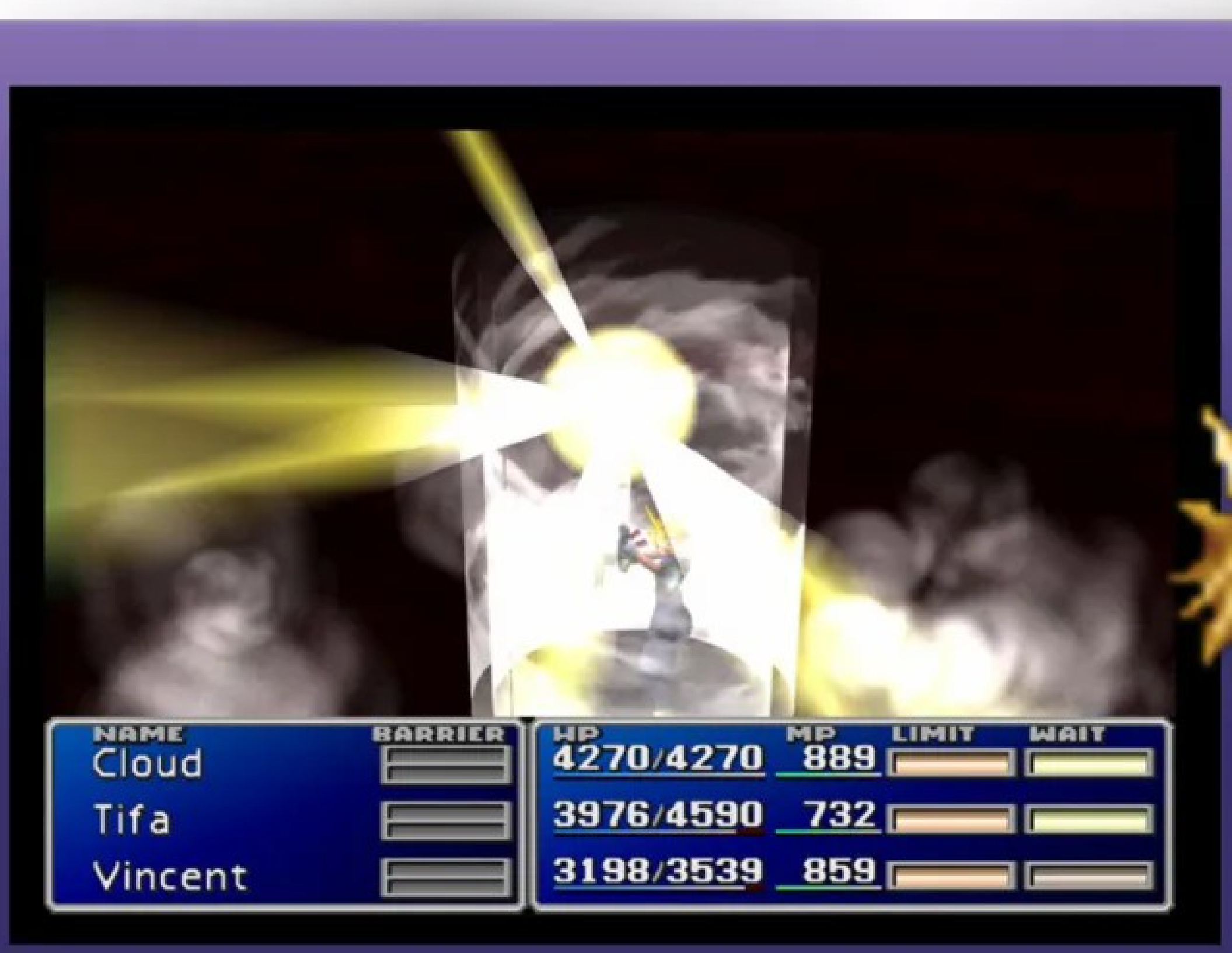
Use Meteorain six times in battle to unlock this penultimate Limit Break.

WHAT IT DOES

Our hero creates a deadly tornado with his Buster Sword. As the name might suggest, this will trigger the 'Instant Death' status on every foe in the battle – if they're immune it'll still do damage.

WHAT IT'S USEFUL FOR

You should be firing this off every chance you get instead of Meteorain in skirmishes where you encounter multiple foes.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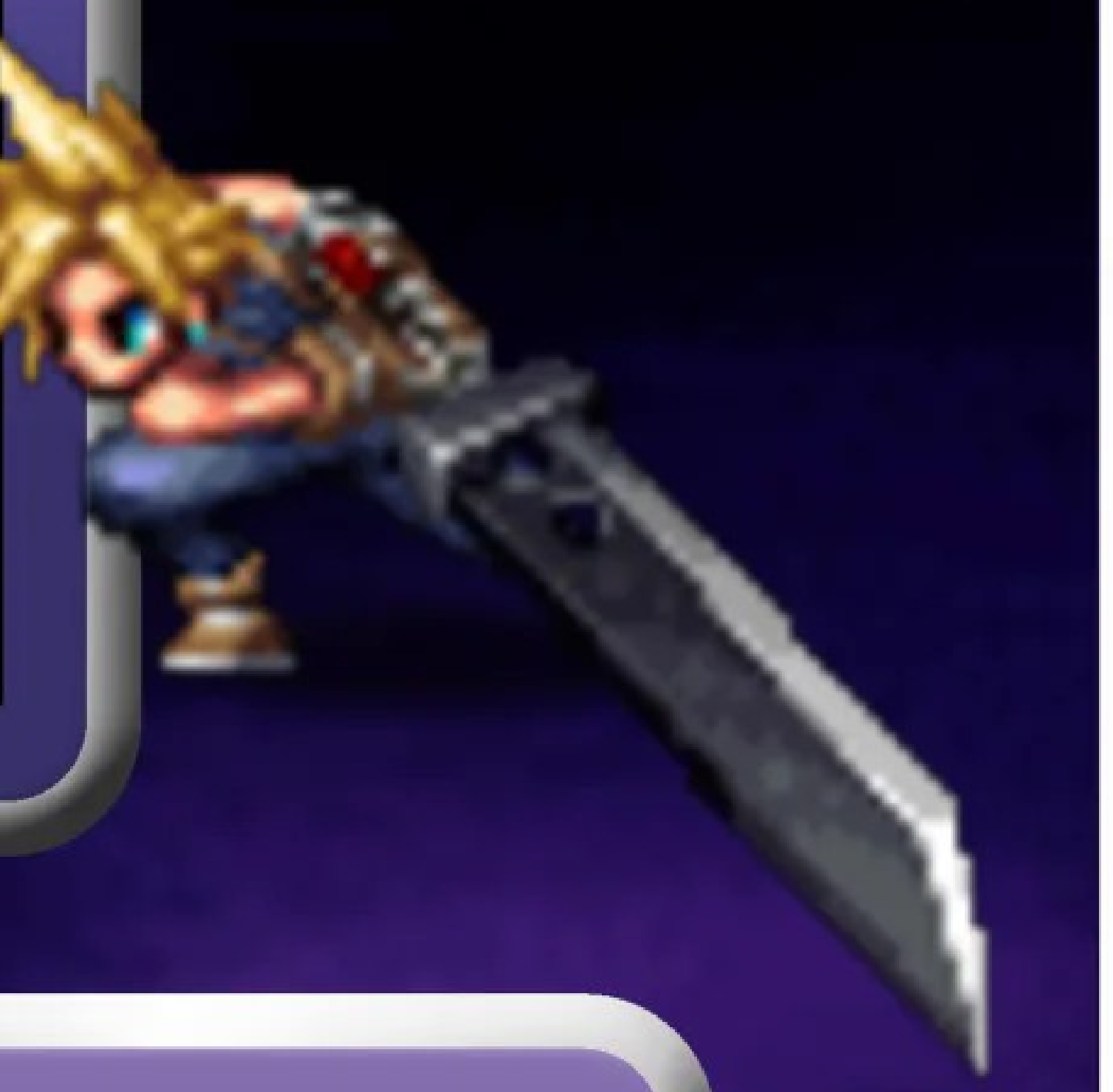
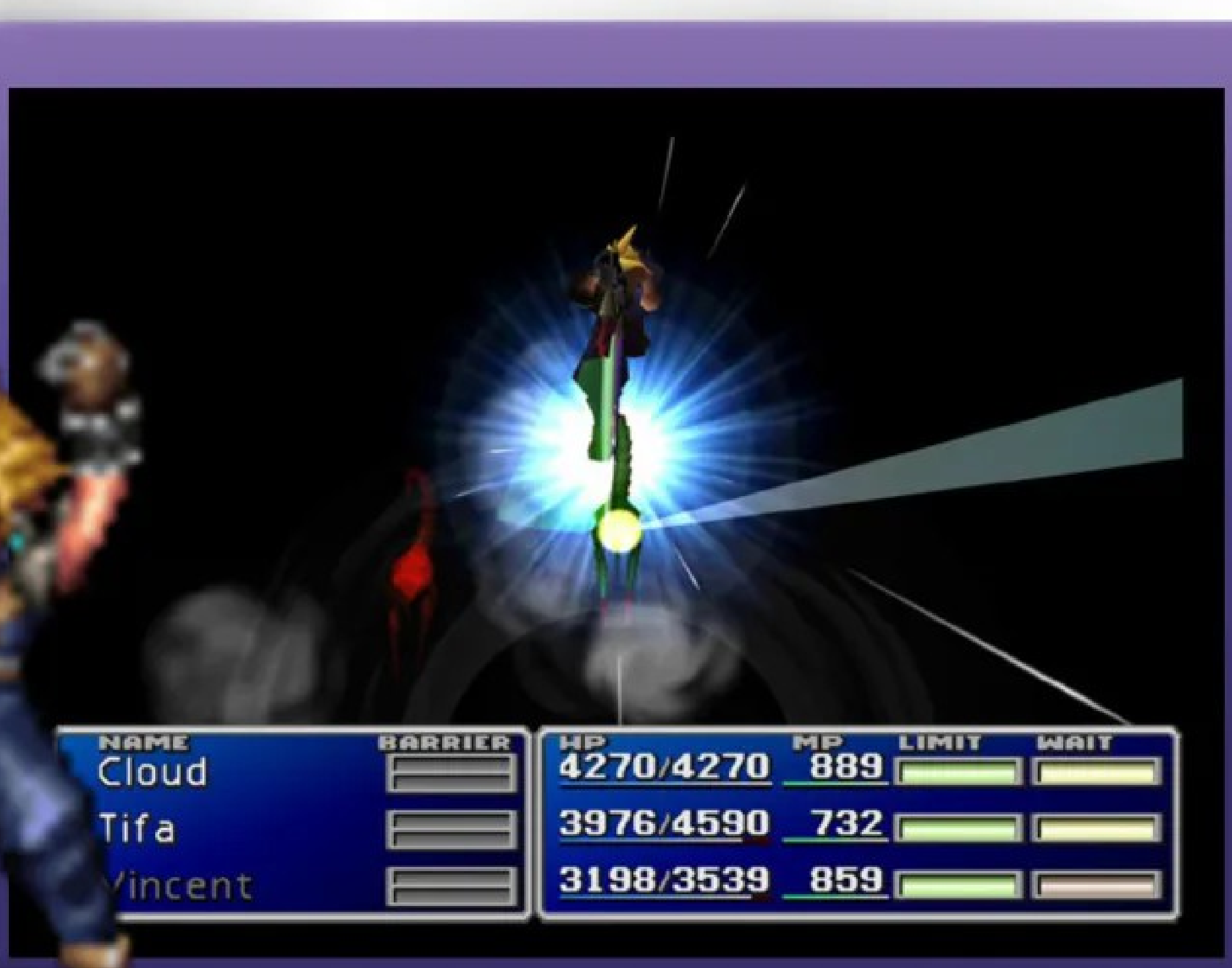
Tifa 3976/4590 732
Vincent 3198/3539 859

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Cloud 4270/4270 889
Tifa 3976/4590 732
Vincent 3198/3539 859

OMNISLASH

HOW YOU GET IT

You obtain this by earning enough points at the Golden Saucer's Battle Square. Good luck!

WHAT IT DOES

This is it. The big one. The Limit to end all Limits. Cloud unleashes all of his anger, rage, heroism, you name it, into this final all-or-nothing flurry of blows that lasts for 15 attacks. Each hit does a little less than a regular attack, but there's a hell of a lot of them!

WHAT IT'S USEFUL FOR

Everything. Everyone. This is the Limit Break that you've been building up to this whole time. You get a free Omnislash to use this as a final hit on Sephiroth, too.

AERITH

When Aerith died in Final Fantasy VII, millions of gamers mourned, so just why did this female videogame character mean so much to so many?

ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** AERITH GAINSBOROUGH
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** FINAL FANTASY VII
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE
- **» FINEST HOUR:** FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** DYING

As Sephiroth descended through the darkness, piercing his sword through Aerith, many a jaw dropped. It was at once heart-lifting and heart-breaking: a genuinely emotional gaming experience, an example of the art of games. And yet it took from us one of the most cherished characters of the entire industry.

Aerith's story is far from happy. Hunted by Shinra all her life and used as a test subject, Aerith witnessed the death of her parents at an early age. The love of her life, Zack, was also lost on an away mission to Nibelheim. Aerith later fell for Cloud because of an uncanny resemblance to Zack and teamed up with Avalanche. They managed to rescue her from Shinra after a failed mission to save the Sector 7 Pillar, but Aerith ultimately died, while summoning Holy, at the hands of Sephiroth. To say the least, it was a troubled life. Yet Aerith had an eternal optimism. "And let me handle Sephiroth. And Cloud, you take care of yourself. So you don't have a breakdown, okay?" she joked before heading to the City of Ancients and certain doom.

From beginning to end, her positivity was almost an alien concept among the morose surroundings of Gaia. Whether selling flowers to Cloud or summoning Holy, Aerith symbolises life in a story that's racked with death and ruin. The last of the Cetra – a peaceful race capable of healing and communicating with the Lifestream – Aerith's entire design, from the beautiful pink dress to the long flowing hair, is one of elegance radiating humanity, as though she were the last remnant of the peace that Cloud and company seek. She is also the one hope of restoring that tranquillity, the true hero of the story. For not only is Aerith the natural antithesis of Jenova (Jenova strives to destroy the planet; Aerith to heal it), she also summons Holy and saves the planet, sacrificing herself in the process. In life, Aerith became a hero. In death, she became a legend.

> **"Aerith symbolises life in a story that's racked with death and ruin"**

Over two decades have passed and website forums still swarm with fans questioning their loss. Many argue that Squaresoft hurried completion of *Final Fantasy VII*, negating her resurrection. The arguments for this are sound: during Cloud's dream about her death, Aerith says: "Then I'll be going now. I'll come back when it's all over", when above the Highwind, Tifa says: "She planned on coming back all along. She always talked about the 'next time'." Then there is the inexplicable fact that, when using PC program Mtrainer, Aerith is made playable after death and even has her own scenes and lines. Such is the love for Aerith that Japanese fans sent a lengthy petition to scenario writer Yoshinori Kitase, demanding a return. Yet this seems to negate the possibility that Aerith was resurrected. After all, she seemed to know she was protected by a higher power.

"It feels like I'm being lead by something," she says. "I'll come back when its all over," she adds before dying summoning Holy, the magic of healing, the one magic perhaps capable of resurrection, which engulfs her corpse as it descends in the water. Finally, there is the possibility that the player decides Aerith's fate. The concluding FMV shows her hand reaching from Holy to Cloud as though there is a link between the two, perhaps Cloud is capable of bringing Aerith back.

So, what is the link? The most seemingly random element of gameplay in *Final Fantasy VII* are the choices Cloud has to make between Aerith and Tifa, which result in the date scene at the Gold Saucer. If Cloud dates Aerith, he will be told that: Jenova (Valvados in the scene) has a weakness for love; Jenova has not yet harmed Aerith for she is contained within Holy; Cloud's love will bring Aerith back and, finally, "The legendary hero and our story live happily ever after." So, which is the right interpretation? Well, there isn't one. The beauty of Aerith is the mystery in which she is shrouded, whereas, had Yoshinori Kitase written a clear resurrection, that mystique would be lost.

Of course, the death of Aerith is not the end of her story. Her journey within the Lifestream has been novelised by Benny Matsuyama's short story, *Maiden Who Travels The Planet*, in which she meets several old friends on her mission to use the Lifestream to aid Holy and destroy Meteor. She also appeared in the anime movie *Advent Children* and in *Kingdom Hearts*, *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*, *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Final Fantasy: Before Crisis*.

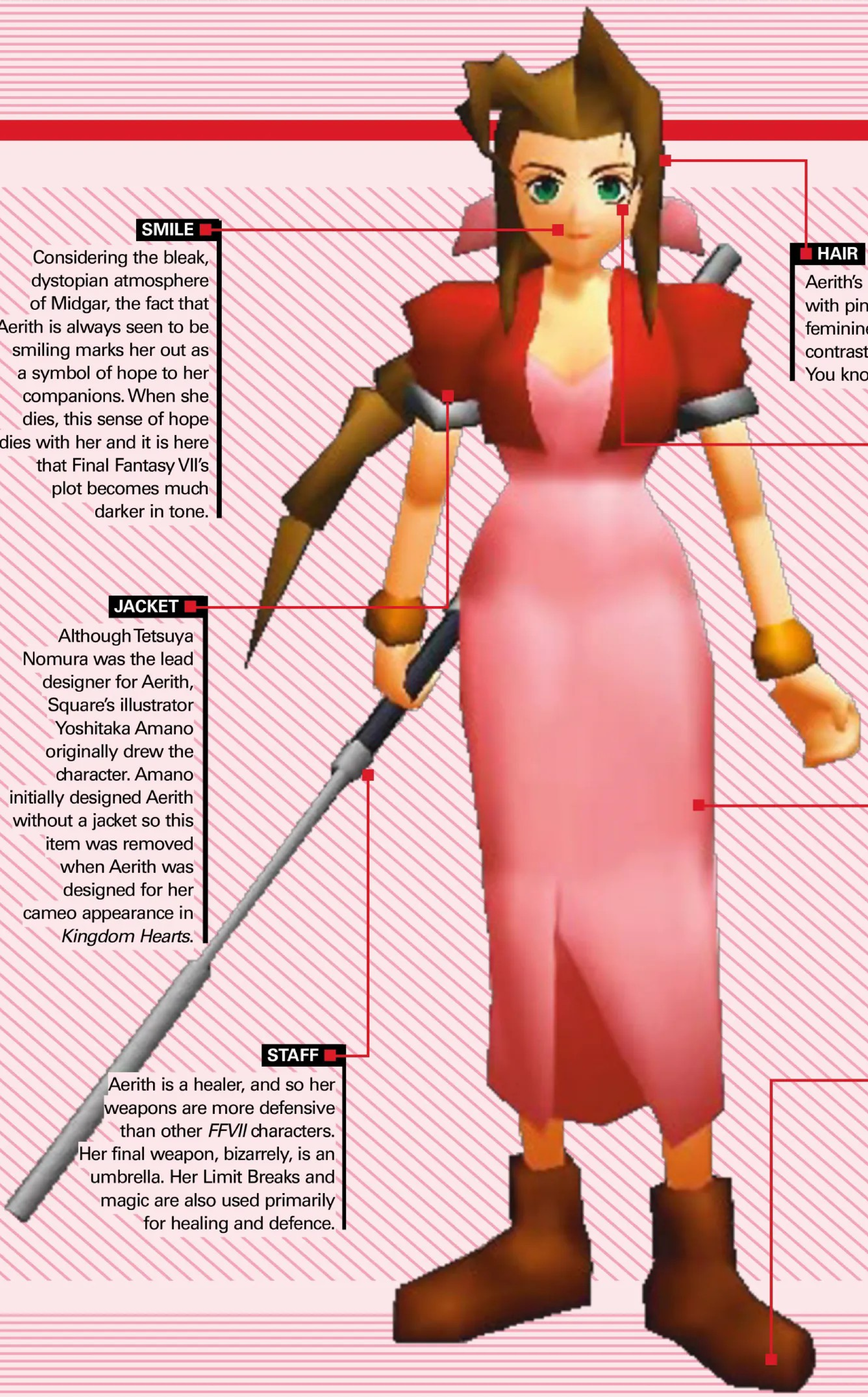
Aerith's mortality has helped establish the immortality of *Final Fantasy VII*. Resurrection or no resurrection, Aerith will always be remembered as a gaming legend. *

> MAGIC MOMENTS

■ The beginning, the end or the rebirth? The question is still being asked two decades later.

■ Does the date scene hold more than meets the eye? Teasingly subtle hints abound.

■ Aerith prays for Holy, saving the planet from Meteors' destruction in the City of Ancient.



SMILE

Considering the bleak, dystopian atmosphere of Midgar, the fact that Aerith is always seen to be smiling marks her out as a symbol of hope to her companions. When she dies, this sense of hope dies with her and it is here that Final Fantasy VII's plot becomes much darker in tone.

JACKET

Although Tetsuya Nomura was the lead designer for Aerith, Square's illustrator Yoshitaka Amano originally drew the character. Amano initially designed Aerith without a jacket so this item was removed when Aerith was designed for her cameo appearance in *Kingdom Hearts*.

STAFF

Aerith is a healer, and so her weapons are more defensive than other *FFVII* characters. Her final weapon, bizarrely, is an umbrella. Her Limit Breaks and magic are also used primarily for healing and defence.

HAIR

Aerith's hair, which is simply tied in a braid with pink ribbons, reflects her personality, feminine, laidback, and friendly, and directly contrasts Cloud's sharp, spiky and angular hair. You know what they say, opposites attract.

EYES

The green eyes symbolise nature and her oneness with the planet, in contrast to the red of Tifa's eyes The colour green has many cultural meanings, many of which can be applied to Aerith. In Medieval culture, green symbolised rebirth and regeneration as well as witchcraft, while the colour is also used in *Dante's The Divine Comedy* to represent hope.

DRESS

The long, pink dress is in contrast to Tifa Lockheart's mini skirt, and is designed to appear ladylike. In *Final Fantasy: Before Crisis*, Tetsuya Nomura added white and green to the dress design. In *Kingdom Hearts*, Aerith also wore a belt.

HIKING BOOTS

For walking, naturally. As both the 'Flower Girl' and a member of the deeply spiritual Cetra race, her connection to nature is important and is reflected in her choice of footwear.

■ A highlight in the annals of the industry. The death of a hero, the birth of a legend.

■ Aerith's corpse descends into the light of Holy, her journey within the Lifestream begins.

■ Is this, as Cloud says, "An answer from the planet?" can he bring Aerith back?

THE WOMEN OF FINAL FANTASY

Final Fantasy I

1. White Mage
FF's characters are 'non gender specific' – only the White Mage looks like it could be female.

2. Darryl
She is a mermaid who is given legs in the Sunken Shrine.

3. Conneria

4. Crescent Lake

5. Arylon

6. Onrac

7. Malmond

8. Fairy

9. Mermaid

10. Matoya
Warriors of Light recover her special crystal, returning her eyesight. First of the 'mad old woman' archetype.

11. Pravoka

12. Princess Sara
Daughter of the King of Coneria. Rescued by the Warriors of Light from Garland in the Temple of Fiends.

13. Kary
Six-armed creature with human head and serpentine lower body.

Final Fantasy II

14. Leila
Lost sea battle with Firion. Gives up her ship and joins the party.

15. Maria
Learns that Dark Knight, a servant to the Emperor, is her brother, Leon. The first lead female – remarkable in an era dominated by male leads.

16. Nelly
Captured by Pavel. Sent to work in Mythril Mine. Later rescued by the heroes. Her father, Josef, is killed in the Snow Cave.

17. Hilda
Daughter of the King of Fynn, Captured during efforts to free him from the Empire as Palamecia. Rescued by Firion. Her boyfriend, Scott the Prince of Kason, is killed, leaving Hilda to his brother, Gordon. Becomes queen.

18. Vampire lady

19. Lamia Queen

20. Vampire girl

Final Fantasy III

21. Refia
Raised by Mythril smith Takka. Refia is a feisty youth who runs away from her rigorous training.

22. Aria
Found in a shipwreck. Joins the party to restore the Water Crystal. Killed during the mission.

23. Delilah
Mad old lady. Lives in the sewers and keeps exploding shoes.

24. Princess Sara Atley
The Princess of Sasune is capable of ending Jinn's curse.

25. Medusa

26. Thanatos

27. Shadow Master

28. Shiva

29. Dullahan

30. Gutsco

31. Kunoichi

Final Fantasy IV

32. Rosa
Lives in Baron Town. Becomes a White Wizard to protect others. Falls ill when searching for lost lover, Cecil. Her character was met with criticism for her weakness and reliance on Cecil, often yelling "Save me, Cecil".

33. Porom
Mysidia Elder takes her under his wing. Wise and brave, in contrast to the rude Black Mage Palom. *FFIV* was the first to take lead female characters to US.

34. Rydia Battle
Falls ill after using a Tita Summon (an earthquake). Joins Cecil after he saves her. Swallowed by Leviathan, raised in the Land of Summons. Is an adult when she rejoins Cecil.

35. Anna
Father dies when Red Wings attack Damcyan Castle. Gives her life to save lover Edward.

36. Luca
Daughter of King Giott. Princess of Dwarves. The Keeper of Calbrena dolls. The Key to the Sealed Cave.

37. Asura
Queen of Phantom Beasts joins the party after you defeat her.

38. Sandy

39. Queen Eblan

40. Cindy

41. Miss Vamp

42. Mindy

43. Queen Eblan

44. Draculady

Final Fantasy V

45. Faris Scherwiz
Lost at sea. Becomes pirate leader. Captures Bartz, Lenna and Galuf before learning of her relationship to Lenna (her sister) and King Tycoon (her father) when she joins the party.

46. Lenna Charlotte Tycoon
First in a new generation of Warriors of Dawn. Searches for her father lost en route to the Wind Shrine. Joins Bartz and Galuf. Unlike her sister (Faris), Lenna represents water and is a beautiful, feminine queen.

47. Krile Mayer Baldesion
Princess of Bal Castle. Inherits Galuf's power after he is killed by Exdeath. Becomes a Crystal Warrior. The first of many 'perky young girl' archetypes in the series – to be followed by the likes of Yuffie and Rikku.

48. Syldra
This Thunder Dragon pulls the pirate ship. Sacrifices herself to save childhood friend, Faris. Returns as a summon.

49. Stella
She dies before the game begins, but a flashback of her death is shown in her daughter Bartz's old house.

50. Jenica
This nurse looks after Lenna and Faris. A prime example of the 'Elderly guardian' archetype.

51. Girl

52. ZephyrZone

53. Siren

54. WoodSprite

55. Syldra

56. Chamcubia

57. Shiva

58. Mellusion

59. Cherie

60. Magissa

61. Belladonna

62. Almucia

Final Fantasy VI

63. Celes Chere
FFVI introduces both more lead and secondary female characters. Celes Chere is a beautiful warrior. Her parents are killed by the Empire. She is given to Cid Del Norte Marquez as a Magitek knight. Potentially the strongest member of your party.

64. Terra Branford
An Esper with strong magical powers. Sought by the emperor, she becomes a magitek soldier before joining the rebels. Another strong party member.

65. Elayne
Cyan's wife. Murdered with her son and the citizens of Doma by Kefka's warfare.

66. Madonna
Falls into the Esper world and suffers severe injuries. Nursed to health by the Esper Maduin, with whom she conceives Terra.

67. Siren

68. Sraphin

69. Old woman

70. Starlet

71. Rachel
Saves her lover Locke's life on a rickety bridge. Loses memory. Later dies in raid by the Empire.

72. Matron

73. Maria
Opera diva who looks like Celes.

74. Madam

75. Lola
Girl from Miranda, in mourning.

76. Katarin
Has issues with pregnancy and childbirth. (A huge step toward acknowledging the female gaming market.)

77. Daryl
Dies racing her ship, the Falcon, against boyfriend Setzer Gabbiani's Blackjack. A female NPC with a full backstory.

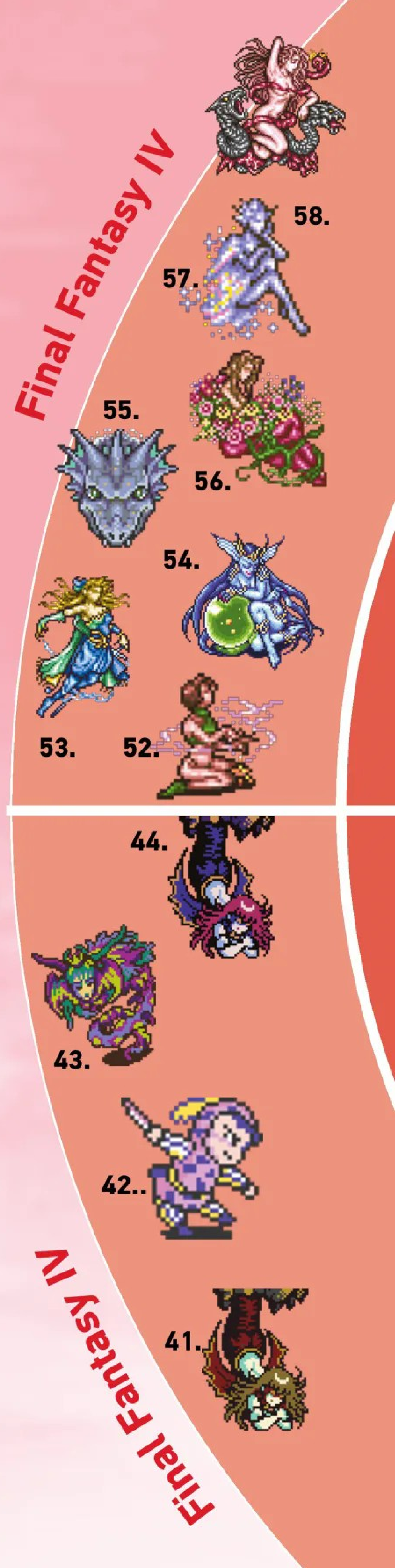
78. Barb-E

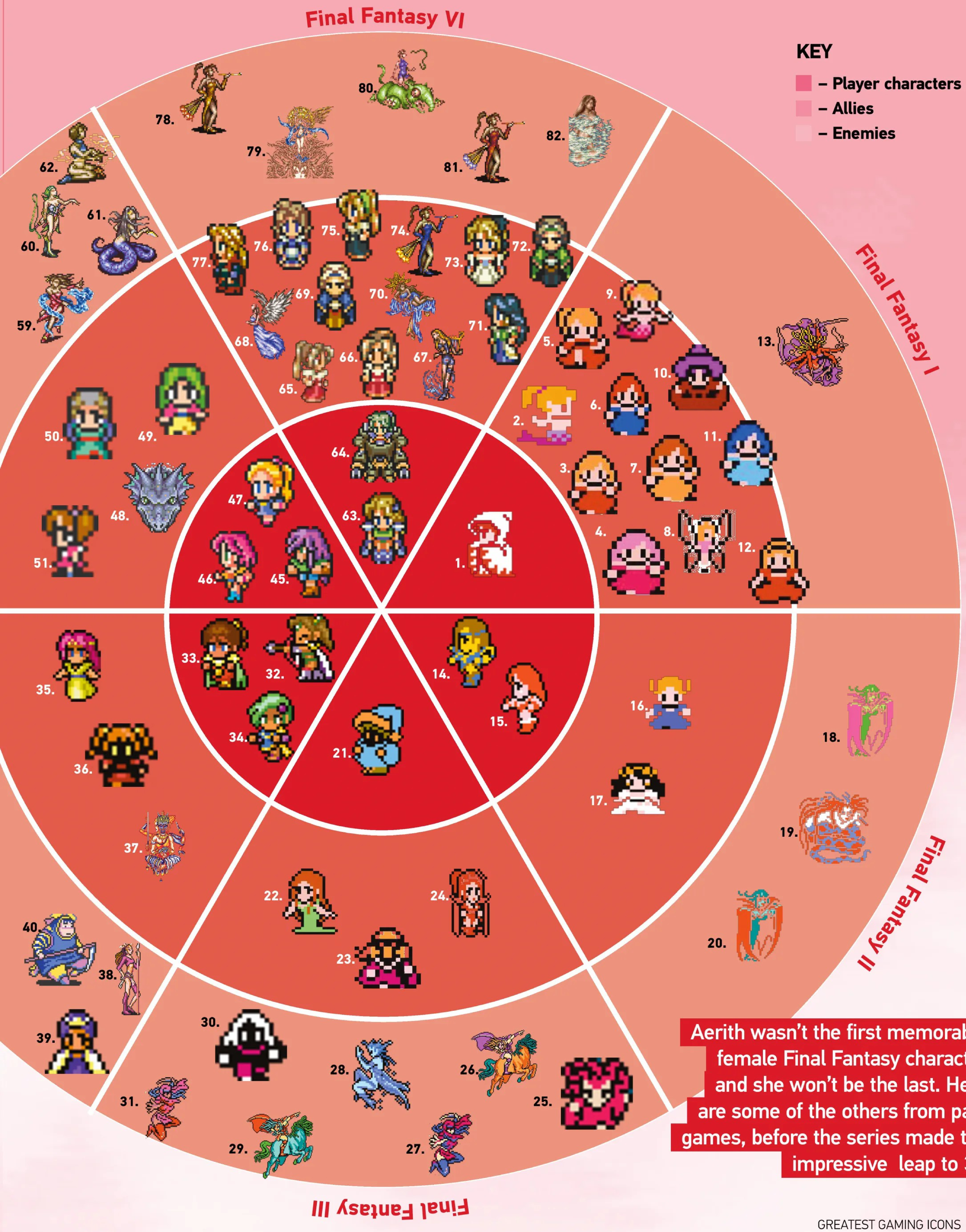
79.Godess

80. Critic

81. Dahling

82. Chadarnook




Final Fantasy VI
Final Fantasy I
Final Fantasy II
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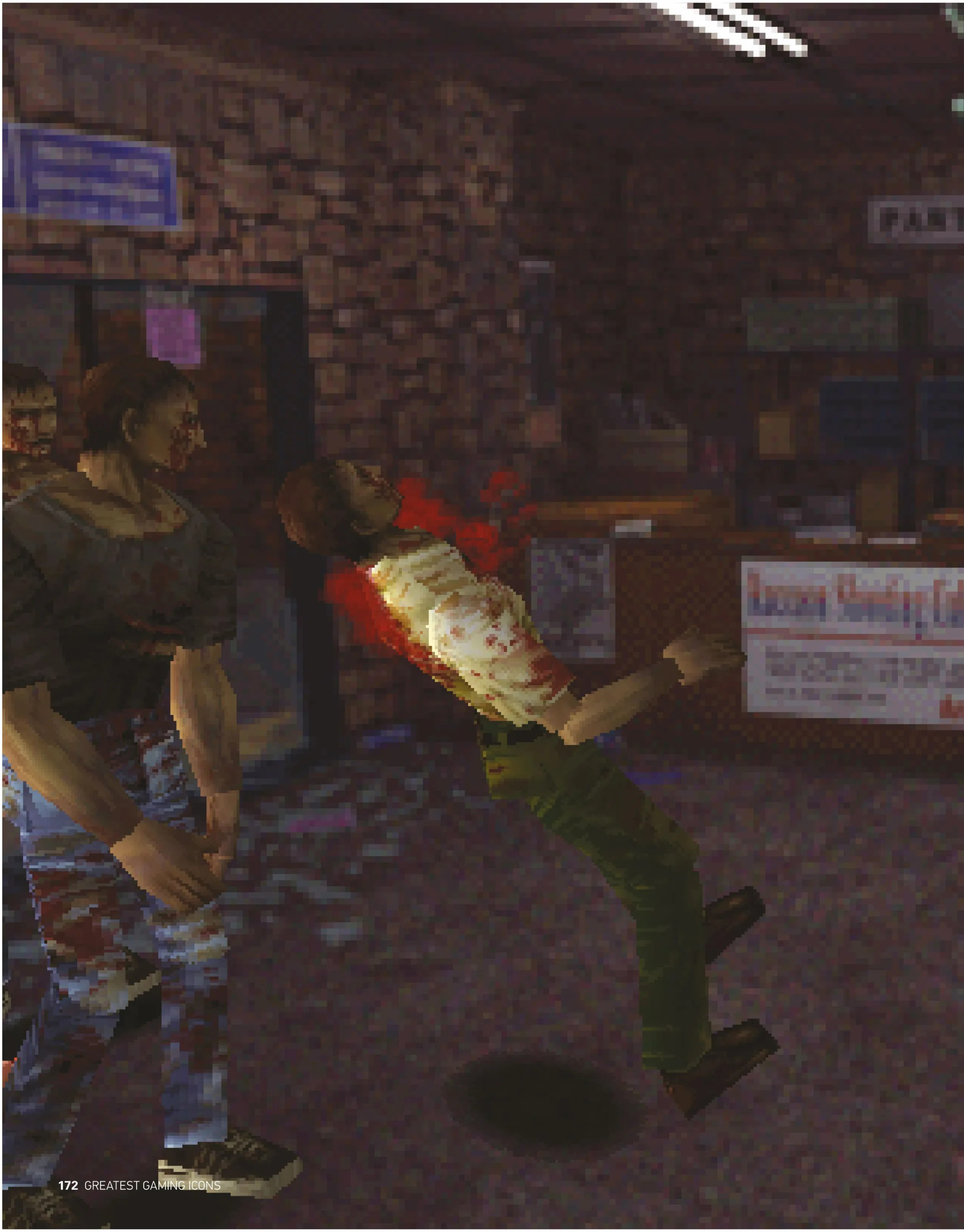
KEY

■ – Player characters
■ – Allies
■ – Enemies

Aerith wasn't the first memorable female Final Fantasy character and she won't be the last. Here are some of the others from past games, before the series made the impressive leap to 3D



ICON PROFILE

» NAME: LEON S KENNEDY

» FIRST APPEARANCE: RESIDENT EVIL 2

» LAST SEEN IN: RESIDENT EVIL 2 (2019)

» FINEST HOUR: RESIDENT EVIL 4

» NOTABLE FOR: GREAT HAIR

» RETROREVIVAL

Resident Evil 2

THE KING OF LEONS

» FAMICOM » 1985 » HUDSON SOFT

When I look at the success of the *Resident Evil* games, the ones that always tend to stick in my mind are the ones starring Leon S Kennedy. He has typically been involved in *Resident Evil* games that have had troubled developments, but you'd rarely guess it from playing the game in question. *Resident Evil 4* pretty much reinvented the survival horror template, spawning countless clones and making developers completely rethink the third-person shooter. But before that was *Resident Evil 2*, and the Leon we met there was very different to the one he would evolve into.

One of the things I love about Leon is that even though he's a cop, he's still green around the gills, and is learning on the job as you play the game. He's an everyman kind of hero that we can all relate to, and he's someone who wants to do the right thing, but is still a little inexperienced and often finds himself completely out of his depth. As you explore the overrun police department of Raccoon City, you begin to realise just how well Leon is fleshed out compared to the earlier heroes of the first *Resident Evil*. Sure, there's no Oscar-worthy writing on display here, but he's a surprisingly deep character for a videogame avatar in 1998, and he's someone that you can always relate to.

He's further fleshed out in the later games, including *Resident Evil 6* and the recent remake of *Resident Evil 2*, but it's the Leon from 1998 that I'll always remember. Whether he was naively trusting Ava Wong, helping wounded police officers, or simply trying to stay alive, you willed him on, as you really wanted him to have a happy ending. Oh, and if you're wondering, the 'S' stands for Scott. ✱

RYO HAZUKI

We take a look back at Sega's great white hope's very own great white hope

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** RYO HAZUKI
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** SHENMUE
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SHENMUE III
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SHENMUE II
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** AVENGING HIS FATHER

By the time of Shenmue's Japanese release in 1999, a stigma had surrounded Sega. The videogame giant was fast becoming associated with short and exhilarating arcade-style games and little else. Sega's final two stabs at the hardware market – the Saturn and Dreamcast – worked to the company's strengths by faithfully reproducing its popular arcade hits in the home, but the shift the industry had taken toward 3D gaming, coupled with the struggle Sega was having juggling both the arcade and home videogame markets, would see the company suffer heavy losses in one console war. And there was a sense that history could repeat itself.

Around the time of *Shenmue*'s conception, *Final Fantasy VII* was achieving huge commercial and critical success for Sony. It's likely Squaresoft's seminal RPG caused Sega to look at bringing another *Shining Force*/*Phantasy Star*-style epic to the fold but fusing it with the kind of arcade gameplay that yielded such success in the coin-op market. It seems Sega's aim with *Shenmue* was to simplify the adventure genre by cross-pollinating it with its popular *Virtua Fighter* series, and to differentiate it from its contemporaries by setting it inside a modern world. The game's premise – a boy is looking to exact revenge on his father's killer – smacked of martial arts cinema, and its Eighties Japan backdrop couldn't be further from the serene greenery of Hyrule Field or the despotic biomechanical cities of *Final Fantasy*.

Shenmue's creator, Yu Suzuki, has stated that the game was originally based on his highly successful *Virtua Fighter* franchise, with fan favourite Akira intended to play the role of protagonist. The game was originally scheduled to appear on Saturn, but during the early stages of *Shenmue*'s development, it would saunter away from its *Virtua Fighter* origins, its native console supplemented by Dreamcast. But despite the transitions, the game's hero, Ryo, would retain many of Akira's distinct looks, most notably his spiky dark hair, sharp facial features and dark brown eyes.

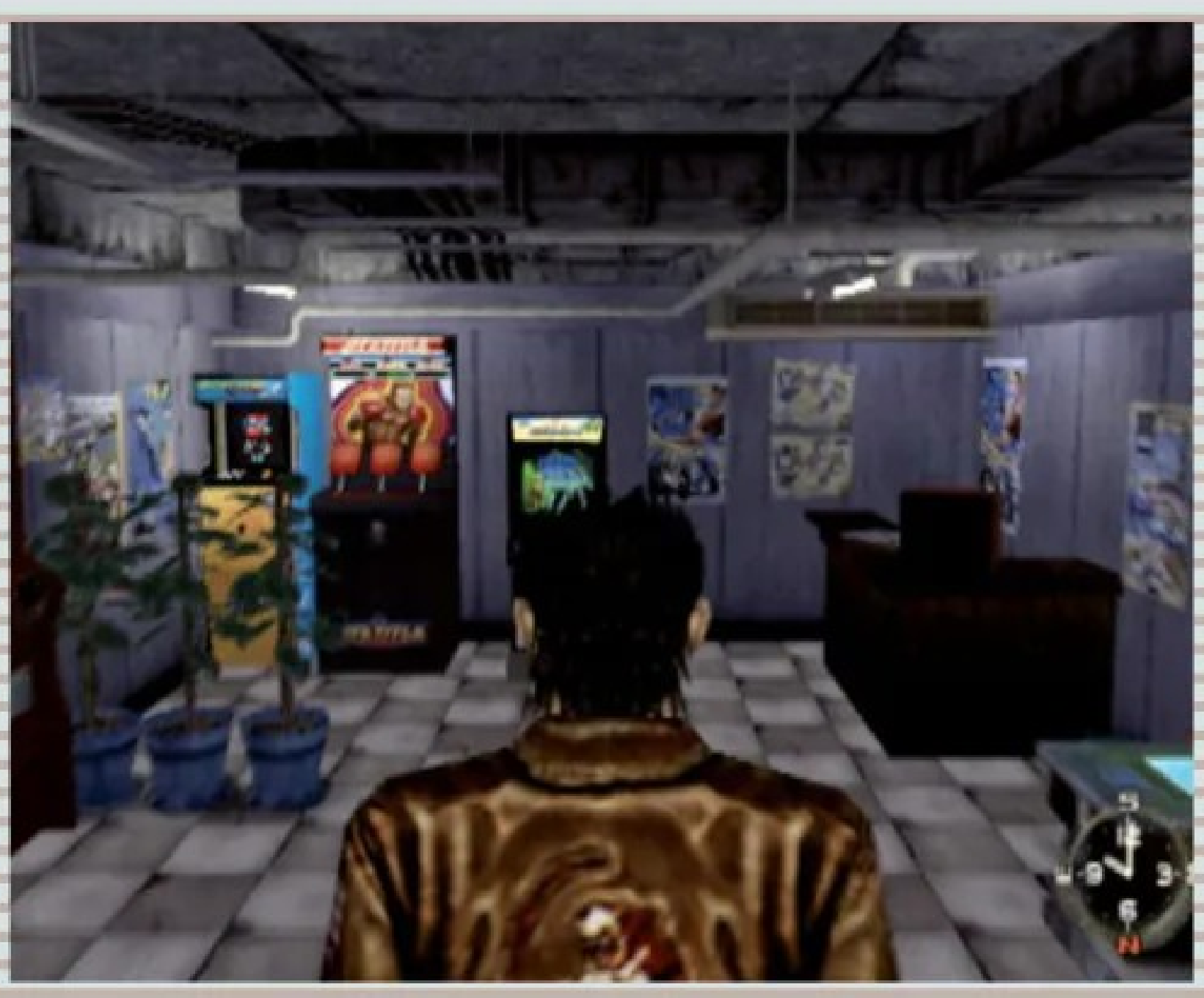
As we find Ryo he's in his late-teens. Following the sudden death of his mother when he was three years old, Ryo has been raised by his father, Iwao. Living with them is their housekeeper, Ine and Fuku, Iwao's student. We're introduced into the game during a fight between Ryo's father and a mysterious figure known as Lan-Di. After Ryo intervenes he is floored by Lan-Di, and watches as his father is killed. Iwao's death leaves Ryo as the last remaining member of the Hazuki family, and desperate to track his father's killer.

In many ways Ryo is painted as an atypical RPG protagonist. Instead of leading a party of heroes, he's depicted as a shy loner who pushes away those he cares for. While many gamers would criticise Sega for making Ryo feel too guarded, and his actions and emotions too cold and robotic, his demeanour could be a clever – and plot-integral – device by Suzuki and his team. Ryo clearly has foibles, but do they work to help make him feel more human? He's an angry, wildly impulsive and an irrational individual whose actions seem driven by one self-destructive emotion: rage. The characters that Ryo encounters in the games not only help to drive the story, but also help to give us insight into Ryo's true character. Characters such as Nozomi, Guizhang and Fuku will often force Ryo to drop his guard. It's a subtle nuance, but one that allows the conversational moments in the game to become all the more poignant while gradually exposing glimmers of depth and compassion to the character.

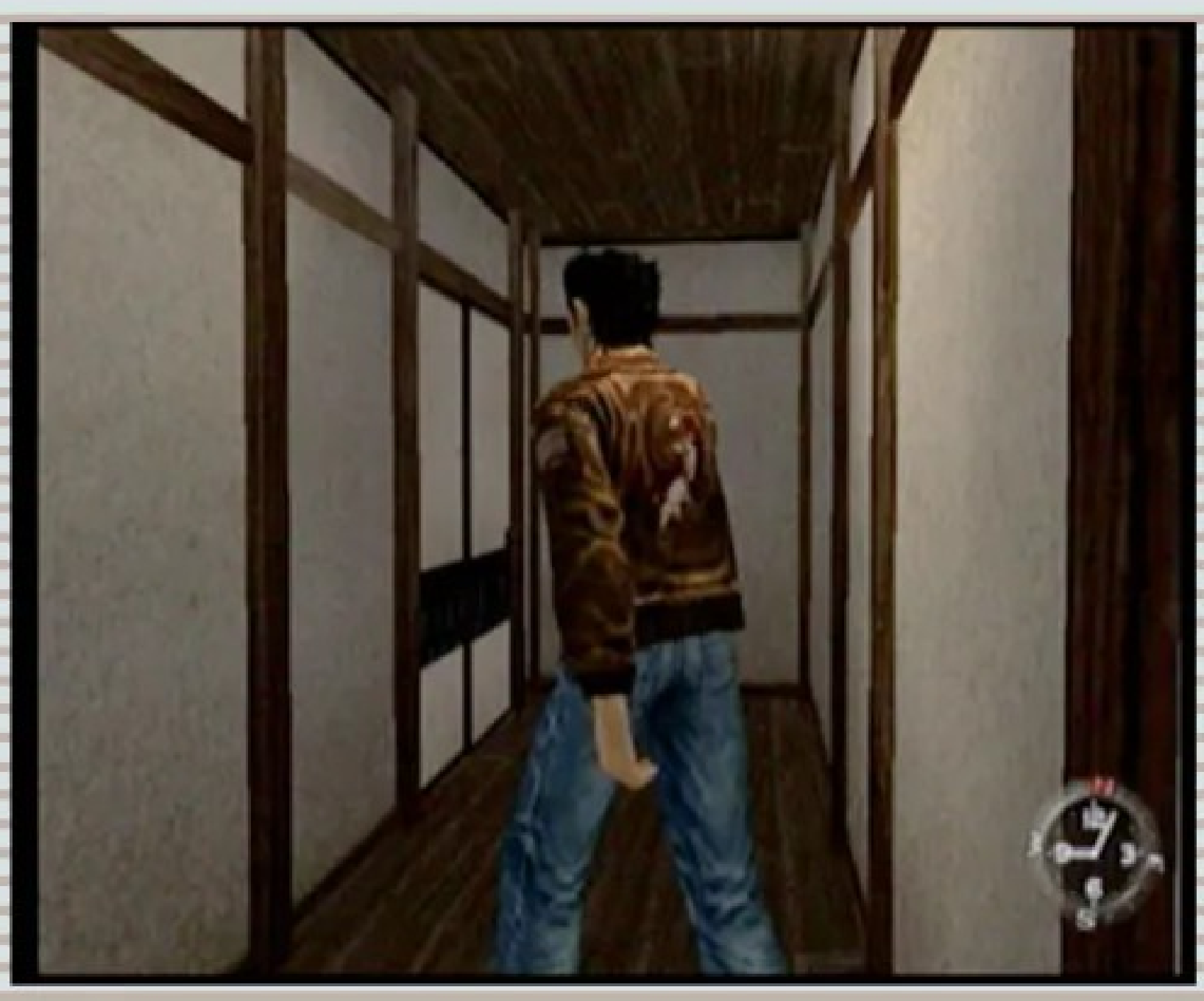
It's made clear to us in the game that Ryo is skilled in the ways of Hazuki-style ninjitsu, as it's equally apparent that he harboured no intentions to succeed his father as head of the Hazuki dojo. There are a number of subtle visual clues that show the distracting influences that music, television and videogames have had on his tutelage. Ryo's attire, a brown leather jacket brandishing American-style badges, blue jeans, spiked up hair and trainers, show Western influences seeping into his lifestyle, pulling him away from his father's will.

Amazingly, Ryo's journey is far from over as a third part of the *Shenmue* wowed fans not too long ago in 2019. However Yu Suzuki has already made it clear that it's not the end of the story, meaning the elusive Lan-Di may forever remain at large. But that doesn't stop *Shenmue*'s fans from speculating how Ryo's journey might end. *

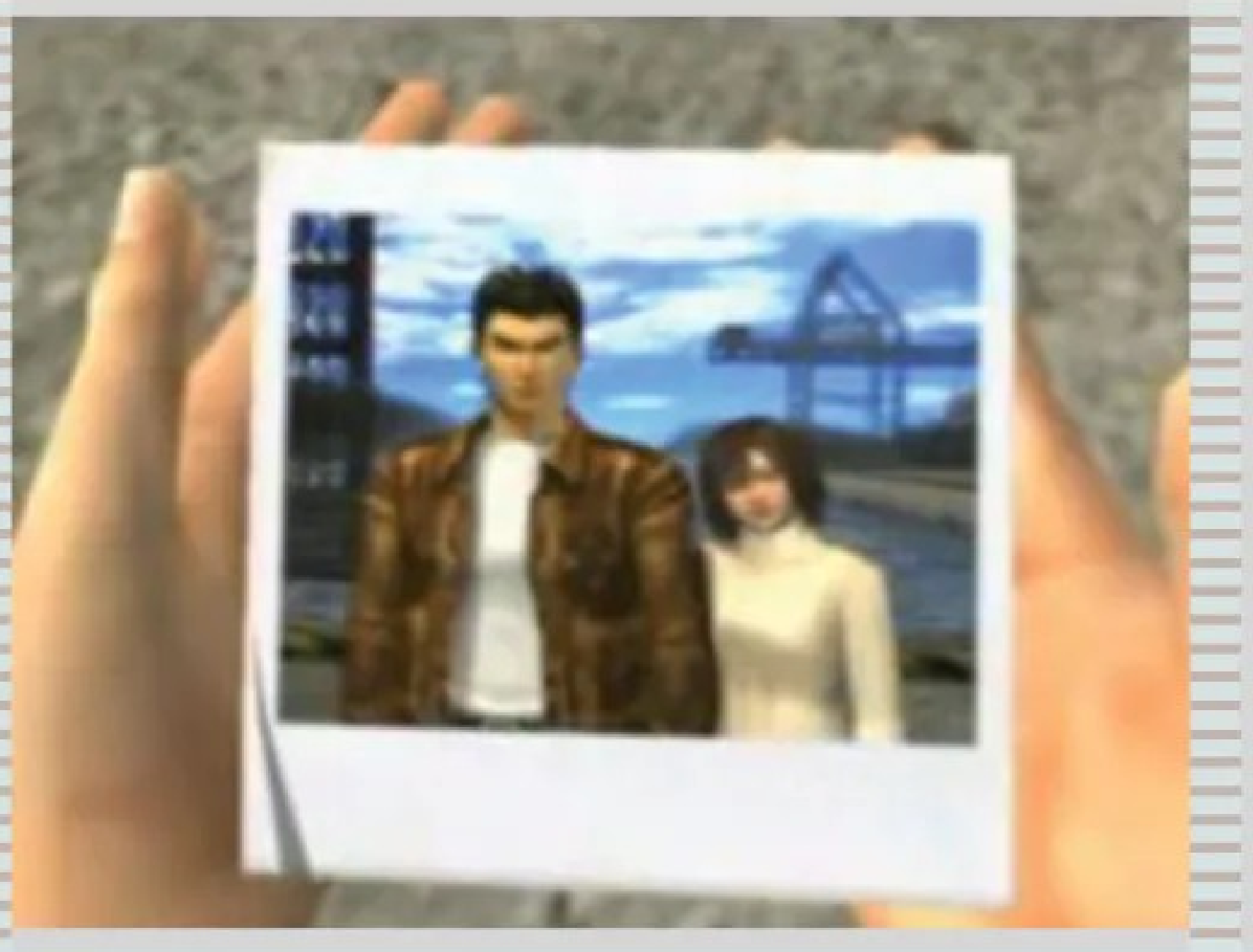
> MAGIC MOMENTS



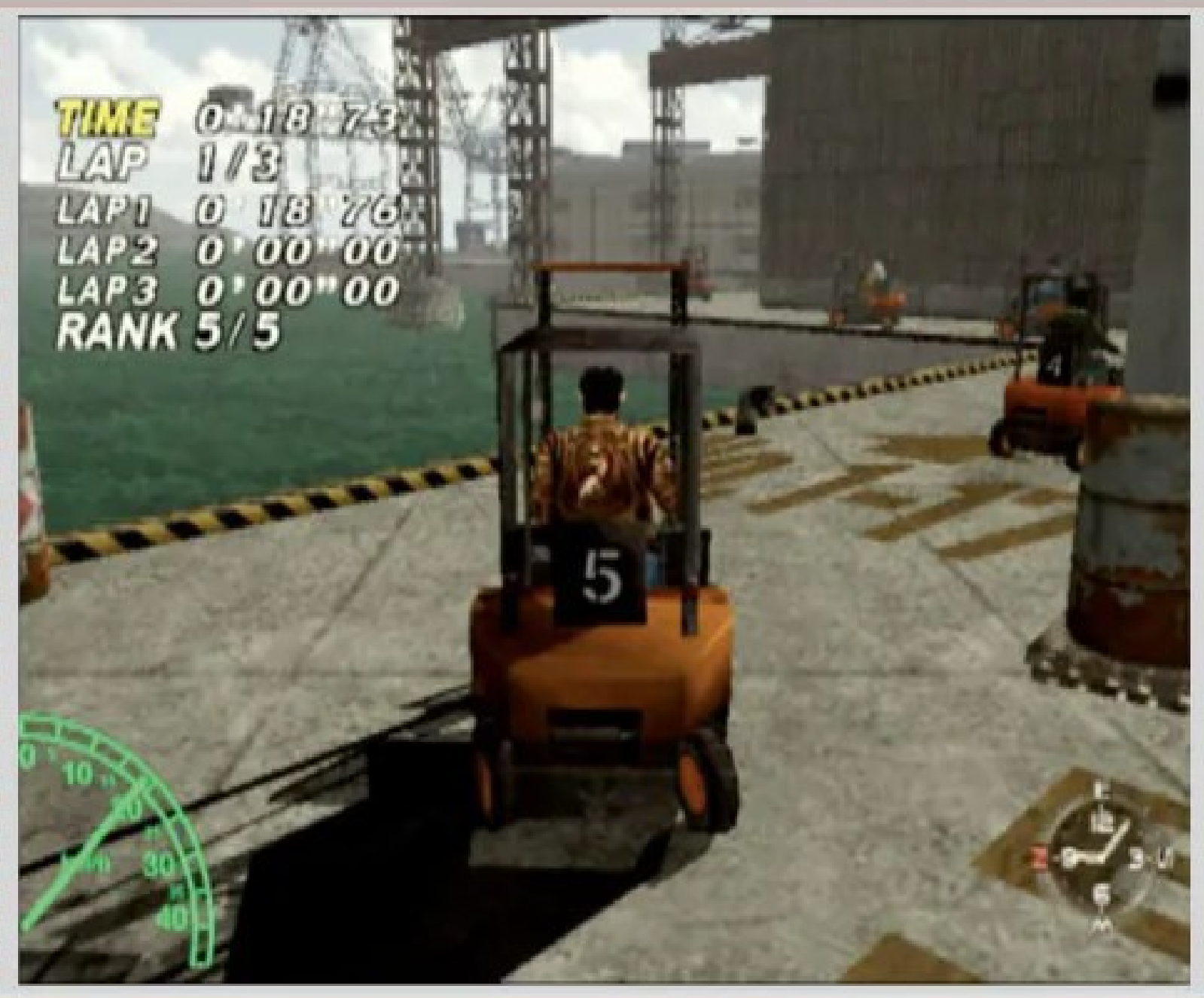
■ The arcade in *Shenmue* houses playable versions of *Space Harrier* and *Super Hang-On*.



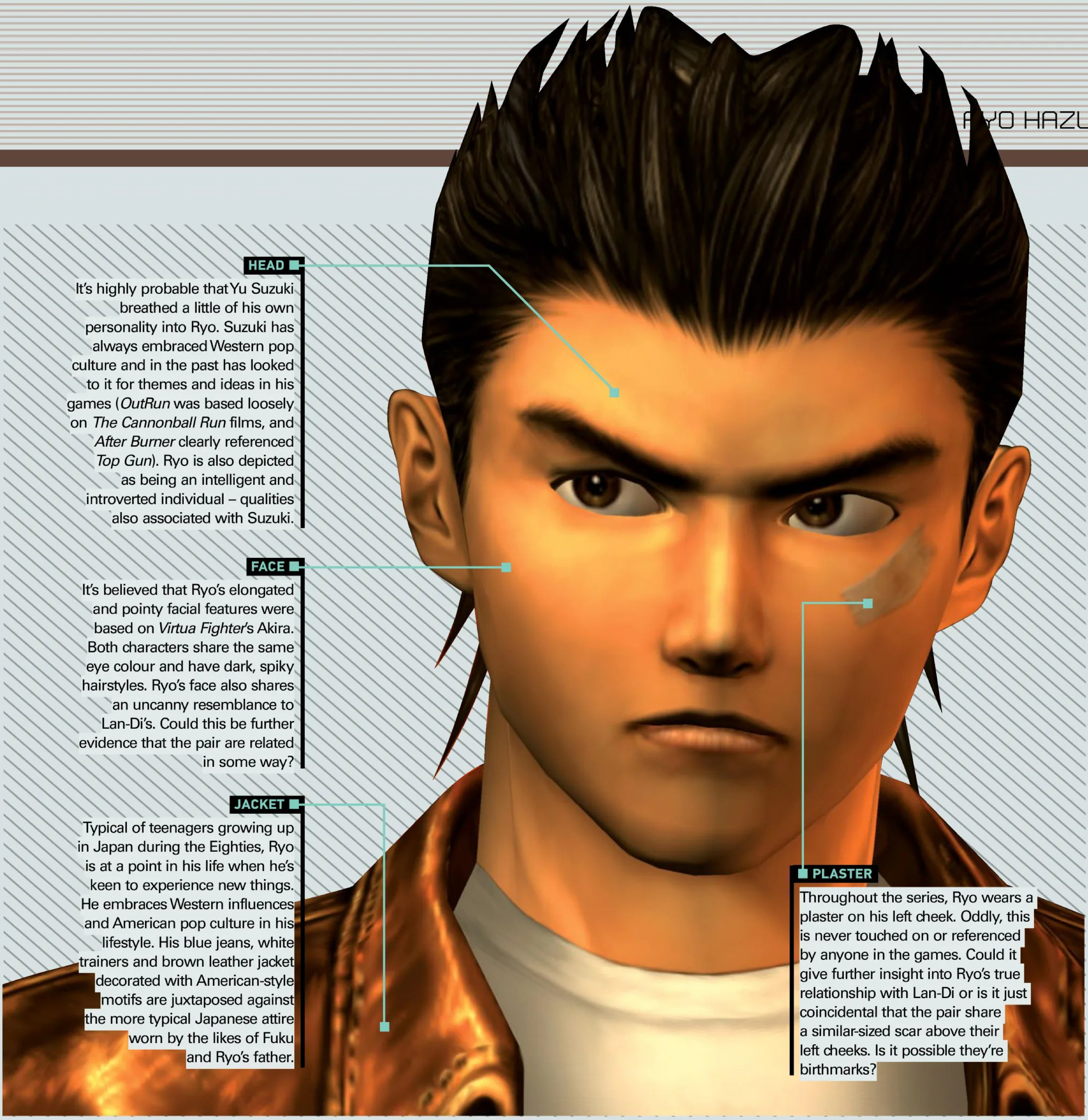
■ Exploring Ryo's home unearths a Sega Saturn, games for which can be bought in the shops.



■ Nozomi and Ryo get papped before Ryo learns that she is leaving for Canada.



■ To learn more about the Mad Angels gang, Ryo is forced to take a job working at the docks.



HEAD

It's highly probable that Yu Suzuki breathed a little of his own personality into Ryo. Suzuki has always embraced Western pop culture and in the past has looked to it for themes and ideas in his games (*OutRun* was based loosely on *The Cannonball Run* films, and *After Burner* clearly referenced *Top Gun*). Ryo is also depicted as being an intelligent and introverted individual – qualities also associated with Suzuki.

FACE

It's believed that Ryo's elongated and pointy facial features were based on *Virtua Fighter*'s Akira. Both characters share the same eye colour and have dark, spiky hairstyles. Ryo's face also shares an uncanny resemblance to Lan-Di's. Could this be further evidence that the pair are related in some way?

JACKET

Typical of teenagers growing up in Japan during the Eighties, Ryo is at a point in his life when he's keen to experience new things. He embraces Western influences and American pop culture in his lifestyle. His blue jeans, white trainers and brown leather jacket decorated with American-style motifs are juxtaposed against the more typical Japanese attire worn by the likes of Fuku and Ryo's father.

PLASTER

Throughout the series, Ryo wears a plaster on his left cheek. Oddly, this is never touched on or referenced by anyone in the games. Could it give further insight into Ryo's true relationship with Lan-Di or is it just coincidental that the pair share a similar-sized scar above their left cheeks. Is it possible they're birthmarks?

■ One of the more tender moments in the game is Nozomi and Ryo's clinch in the park.

■ Ryo's best friend, Tom, tells him that he's decided to leave Japan for a new life in America.

■ When Naomi is kidnapped by the Mad Angels, Ryo borrows a motorbike and goes to rescue her.

24 Defeated
02:06:00

■ The game builds to an epic rumble between Ryo and Guizhang against 70 Mad Angels.

SHENMOIRS

A week in the life of Ryo Hazuki

Monday 5th

■ I walked into Dobu Street today to ask if anyone knows where I can find sailors, but all I get is funny looks. No one seems to be able to offer a helpful response. I must track down Lan-Di at any cost even if it means asking people the same peculiar question over and over and over again.

■ I took out my aggression on a game of *Super Hang On*. Love that game.

■ I spoke to Tom earlier today. He didn't know where I can find any sailors, so I bought a hot dog and he showed me some martial arts (well he waved his foot around in the air). On the way home I stopped at the arcade and played a few games of *Super Hang-On*.

Then kick, O.K.?

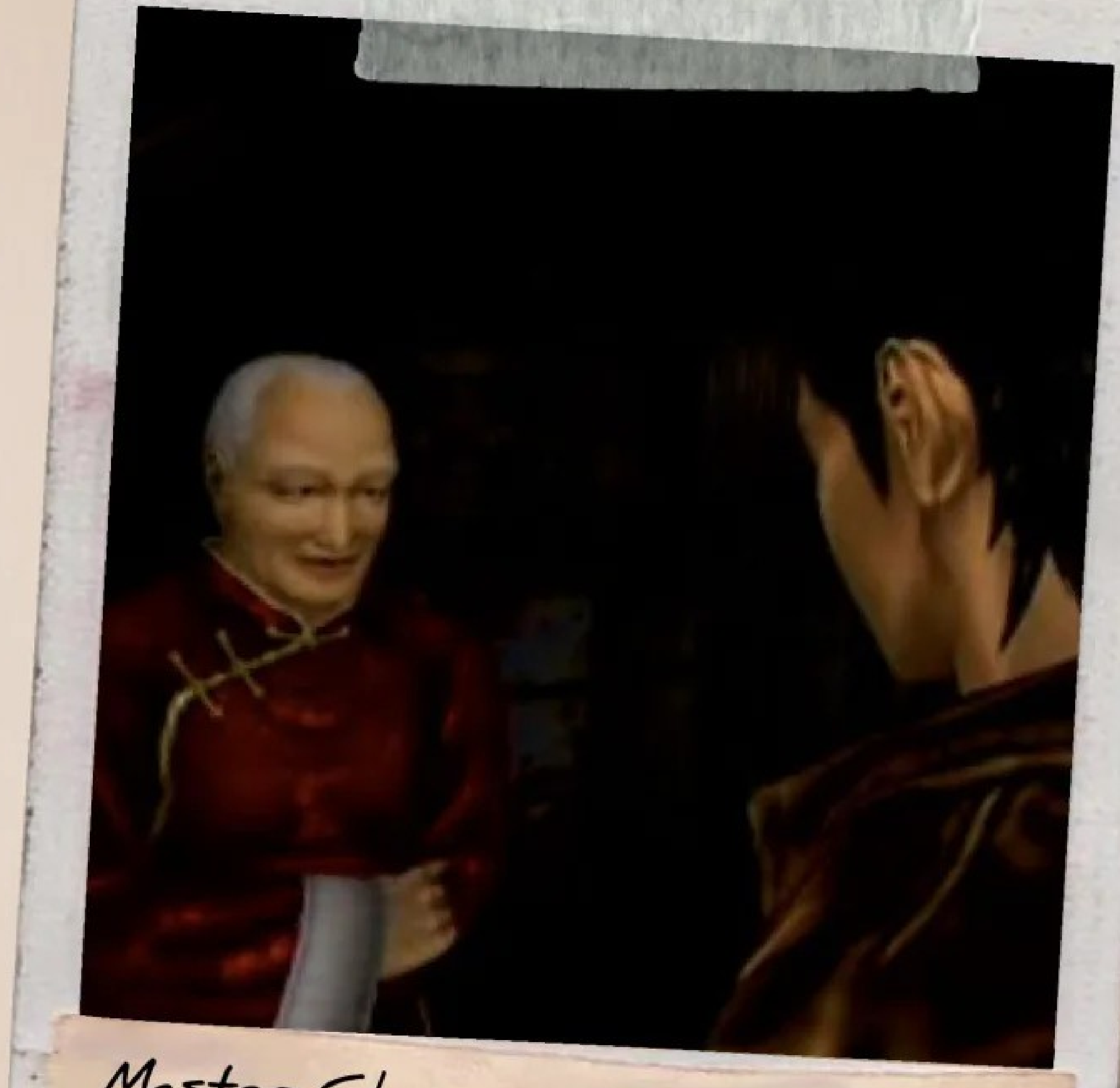
Tom showed me some questionable ninjitsu. Sorry, Tom, but I just can't take a guy who wears a pyjama top seriously.

Tuesday 6th

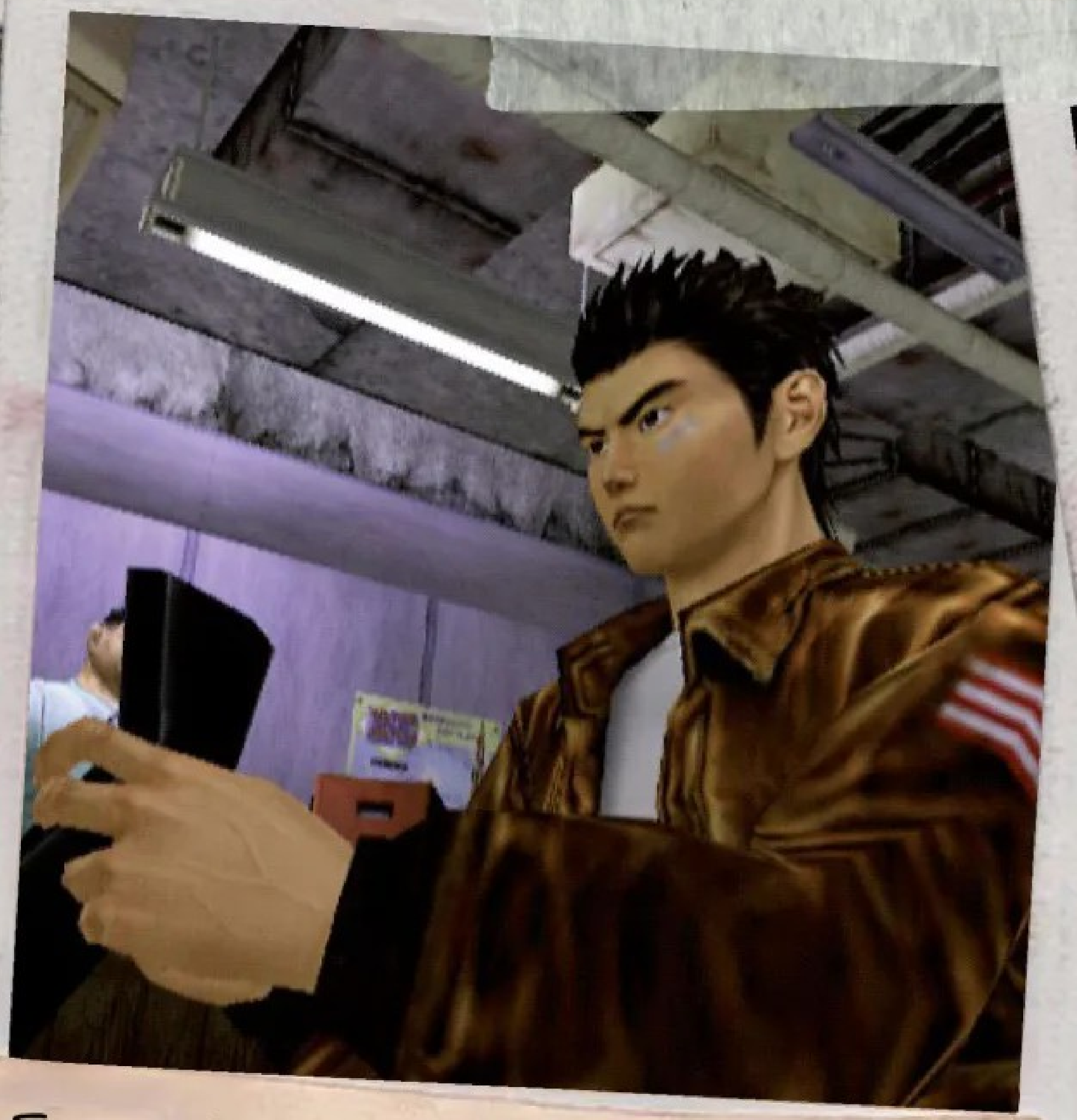
■ I met Nozomi at Sakuragaoka Park today. She was wearing that white knitted jumper and tartan skirt I like. That reminds me: I must collect next week's leather jackets, white T-shirts and blue jeans from the dry-cleaners in Yamanose tomorrow. Anyway, Nozomi was talking to me about something, but all I could think about was *Super Hang-On*. I hope it wasn't important.

■ I'm getting somewhere with the sailors. Master Chen told me that Sailors often hang around boats and saltwater. I reckon I can find boats and saltwater near the docks… and maybe a *Super Hang-On* coin-op if I'm lucky.

Nozomi wanted to meet me in the Sakuragoaka Park; I just wanted to play Super Hang-On.



Master Chen seems to know quite a lot about sailors.



Snap 457 of 4,568 of me playing the awesome Super Hang-On. My collection is growing fast.

Naoyuki gave me a lift into town today. Why do I have this picture of him?

Wednesday 7th

■ I saw Naoyuki working on his motorbike this afternoon and he kindly gave me a lift into town. I collected my washing from the dry-cleaners and played some *Super Hang-On*. Later on I broke up the day by playing some more *Super Hang-On*.

■ This afternoon I went shopping for a new pair of blue jeans, a white T-shirt, and a fresh packet of plasters. After ten minutes of shopping I found one of those *Super Hang-On* machines.

January 1987

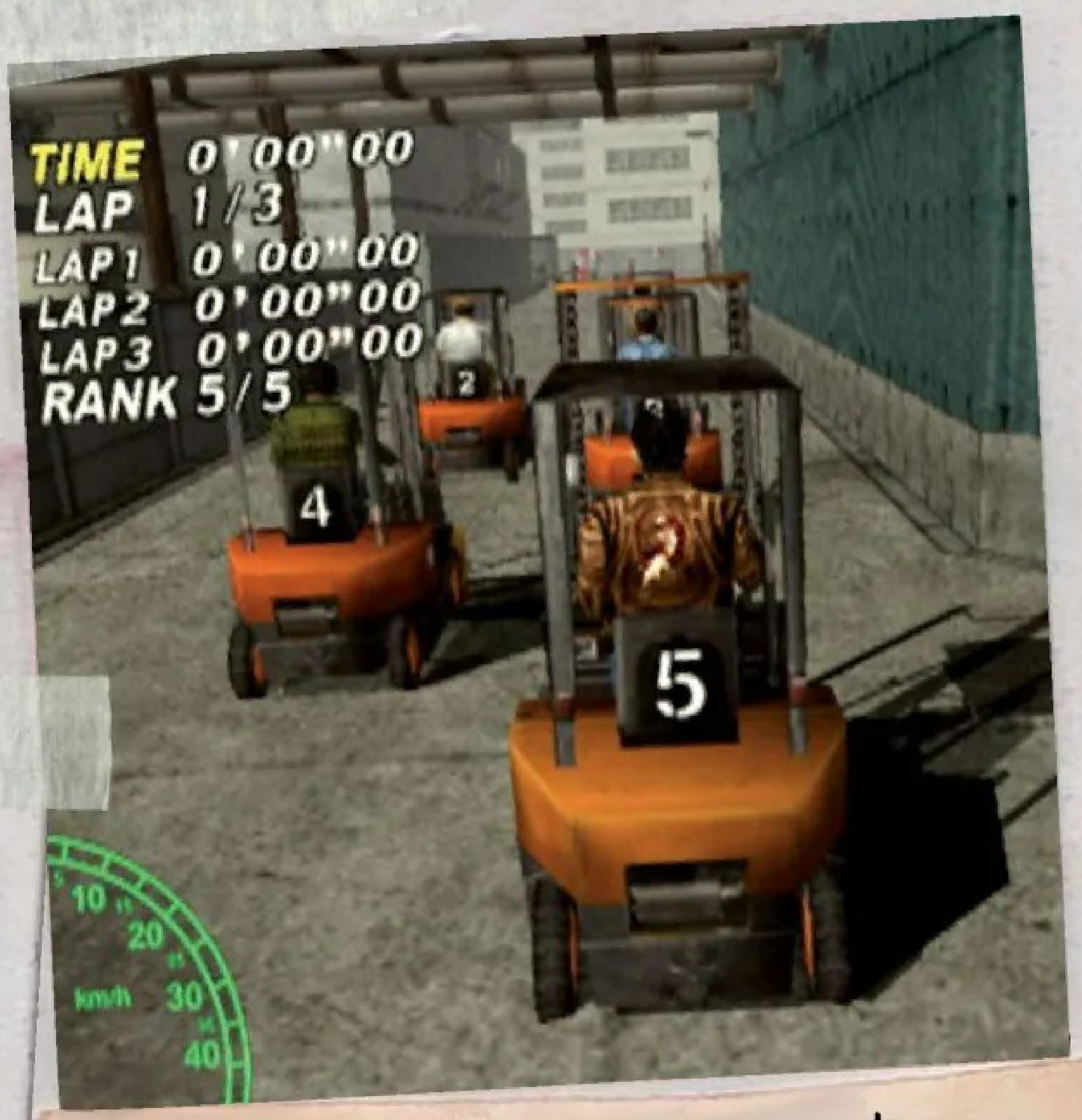
Thursday 8th

■ Today I caught a bus over to the docks. After speaking to a couple of people, I discovered that there is a gang that hangs around there that could be connected to Lan-Di. I also noticed a job vacancy for a forklift driver with no prior forklift driving experience, and, realising that I'm a forklift driver with no prior forklift driving experience, I enquired about the job. I have an interview tomorrow. Result! Afterwards I played some *Super Hang-On* before heading off home. I meditated in preparation for my interview tomorrow and then dreamed about pulling some sweet moves in *Super Hang-On*.

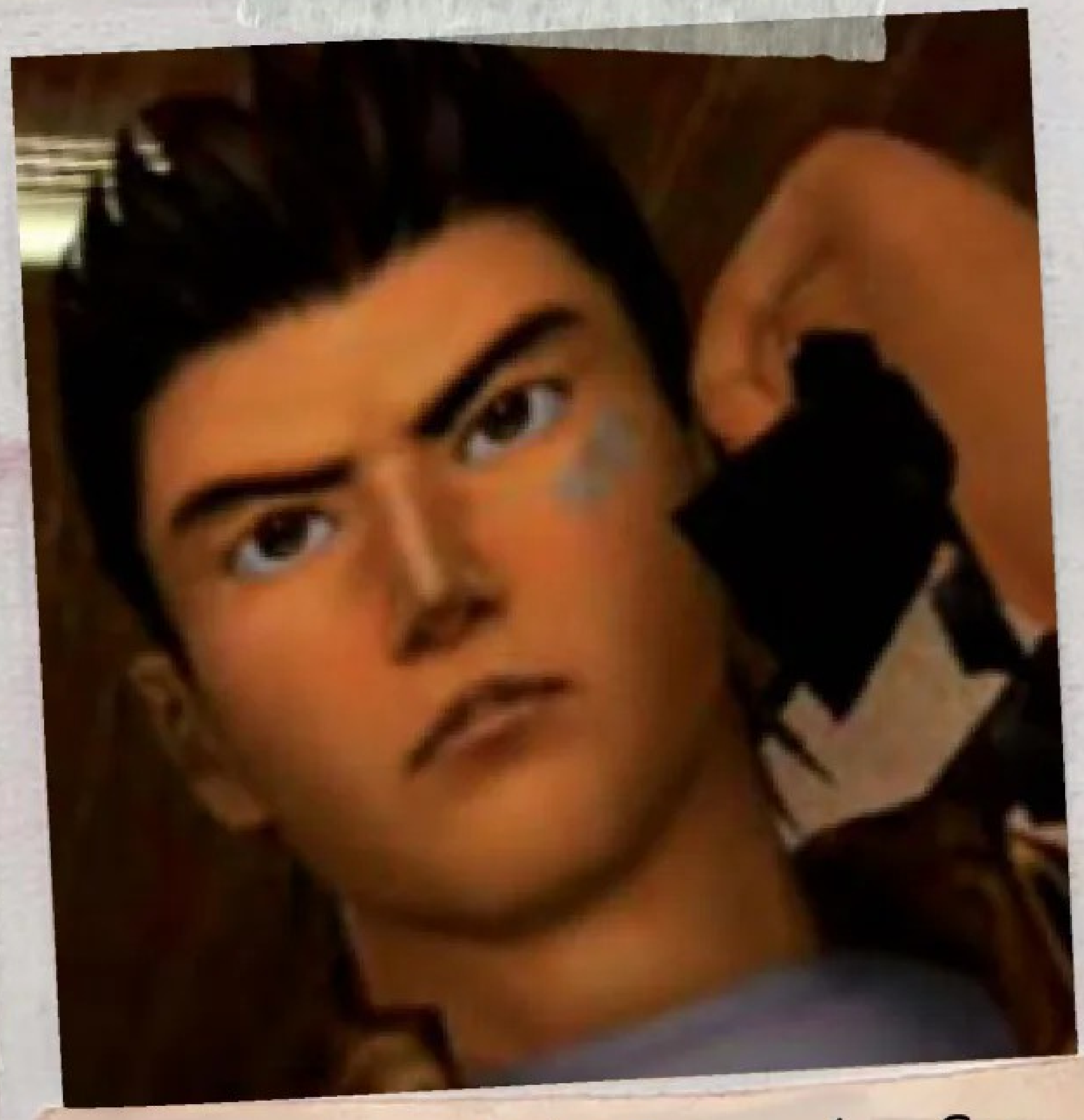
Friday 9th

■ I couldn't sleep a wink last night. Perhaps I was nervous about my job interview. I didn't need to be, the interview went well and I start the job Monday. I rang Fuku and Nozomi to tell them the good news, and then I remembered that Fuku actually lives with me.

■ In the evening I stopped off at the arcades to try out that new *Space Harrier* game from Sega, and it was pretty good. It's about a guy with a rocket launcher blasting dragons and woolly mammoths in the head. It's probably as good as my beloved *Super Hang-On*.



The job interview was simply a forklift race between all the job applicants. The winner got the job.



I actually waited 17 minutes for Fuku to answer the phone.

SPACE HARRIER

Snap 1 of 1 of me playing that Space Harrier game.

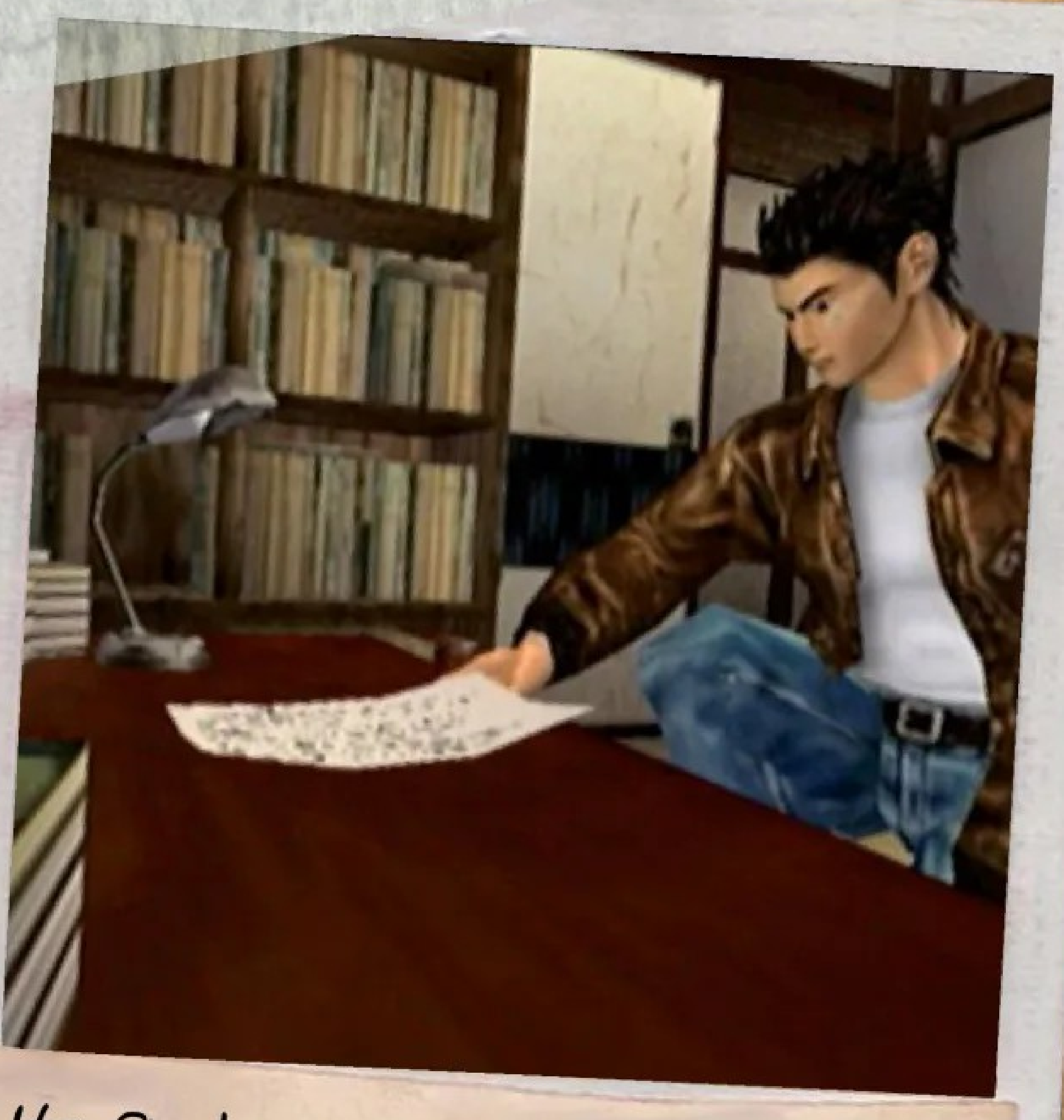
Saturday 10th

■ It snowed today so Fuku and I decided to have a snowball fight. The snow reminded me of milk. The milk in the grass reminded me of cows chomping grass in field, and the greenery of the field reminded me of Lan-Di's regal tunic. Fighting back my anger I had to leave Fuku and gather my thoughts over a marathon session of *Super Hang-On*.

Sunday 11th

■ Tom visited the house today. He said he's going to move his hot dog stand to the docks. Apparently the local health-and-safety officer has been on his back and is threatening to shut him down. He says he's going to lay low for a while, and if the heat doesn't blow over soon he may be forced to leave the country.

■ In the evening I finally finished work on my screenplay. It's about a futuristic zoo where, owing to fringe sciences, dinosaurs are the main attraction. I've been working on it for about seven years.



Its final page is complete. Phew, I'll add it to the other four.

Perfect Dark

THE NAME'S DARK, JOANNA DARK

» N64 » RARE » 2000

After Rare's incredible success with the *James Bond* licence, many N64 owners expected a sequel to *GoldenEye* to appear on their beloved games console. Sadly, a sequel never arrived, but in its place was another stunning first-person shooter that not only proved that *GoldenEye* hadn't been a fluke, but it showed just what was possible when you were unshackled from a restrictive licence and given more creative control.

Perfect Dark tells the story of Joanna Dark, a young female spy recruited by the mysterious Carrington Institute to extract a defector from Carrington's competitor, dataDyne. Before long she's caught up in an interplanetary war between two rival factions and… well, we won't spoil it for you, because *Perfect Dark*'s twisting and turning plot is just one of the examples where it improves on Rare's earlier shooter.

Graphically it's superb as well, taking a modified version of the *GoldenEye* engine and pushing it to breaking point. It even manages a hi-res mode via the N64's expansion pack, but this does impact on the visuals, forcing slowdown, particularly when windows get shattered. And damage to windows and other parts of the environment happens regularly, thanks to the insane amount of weaponry that Joanna has access to.

The futuristic setting allowed the team to have all sorts of fun with Joanna's arsenal, and there's a mixture of both real and futuristic weaponry to choose from. Although there are conventional weapons like uzis and submachine guns, *Perfect Dark* also introduced insane offerings like the FarSight XR-20 that enabled Joanna to shoot through walls. She also had an awesome Laptop Gun that could transform into an innocuous looking laptop or be thrown down to become a sentry gun.

By far the biggest difference between the two games was *Perfect Dark*'s multiplayer mode, which delivered all sorts of new mechanics and customisation options, as well as the ability to play against AI-controlled bots for the first time.

Although it set the world alight on its release, time hasn't been kind to the original *Perfect Dark* and it has aged somewhat. Our advice? Pick up the excellent Xbox 360 HD remaster and relive the experience all over again. *

Picked up some ammo!

ICON PROFILE

- **» NAME:** JOANNA DARK
- **» FIRST APPEARANCE:** PERFECT DARK
- **» LAST SEEN IN:** RARE REPLAY
- **» FINEST HOUR:** PERFECT DARK
- **» NOTABLE FOR:** SPYING

MASTER CHIEF

Since he first emerged, the Master Chief has kicked alien ass and saved the day. Join us as we celebrate the most famous of Spartan soldiers

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** MASTER CHIEF
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** SUPER BOMBERMAN R
- » **FINEST HOUR:** HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** NEVER TAKING HIS HELMET OFF

Spawned from the success of *Doom*, the first-person shooter genre exploded in the mid-Nineties, with seemingly every other PC game spinning this increasingly well-trod path. On consoles like the PlayStation and Nintendo 64, the phenomenon was not as extensive. But that was about to change with the advent of Microsoft's Xbox, a games machine that desperately needed a killer app, and a killer hero, to help it against the PlayStation 2.

Towering at over seven feet and weighing 450 kilos, the Master Chief is an imposing figure. Ensconced within a state-of-the-art powered assault suit known as Mjolnir, the Chief is a product of the Spartan-II project, an experiment in augmenting humans both biologically and cybernetically to create squads of super soldiers. Much of the design and enhancements of the Spartans is down to the founder of the project, Dr Catherine Halsey. Initially created with colonial unrest in mind, the Spartans' arrival was timely once the primary *Halo* antagonist, the Covenant, arrived on the scene. Trained from the age of six, the children were conscripted (read: abducted) before instruction began on the planet Reach. Apparently the last Spartan alive, the Chief escapes Reach when it's devastated by Covenant forces, embedded into a cryonic sleep aboard the UNSC Halcyon Class light cruiser, Pillar Of Autumn.

Gruff, taciturn and brutal, the Master Chief is a mix of Clint Eastwood, Judge Dredd and a heavily armoured Captain America. Throughout the series, the Chief fights the Covenant, taking down swathes single-handedly, before turning his attention to the Forerunners, specifically the Didact. An expert in battlefield tactics, he can operate any weapon with ease, effortlessly handle explosives and pilot vehicles both human and alien. Safely inside his battle armour, the super soldier is near invulnerable thanks to a powerful shield. Able to withstand extreme damage before failing, the Spartan's shield then quickly regenerates, leaving him ready for combat once more.

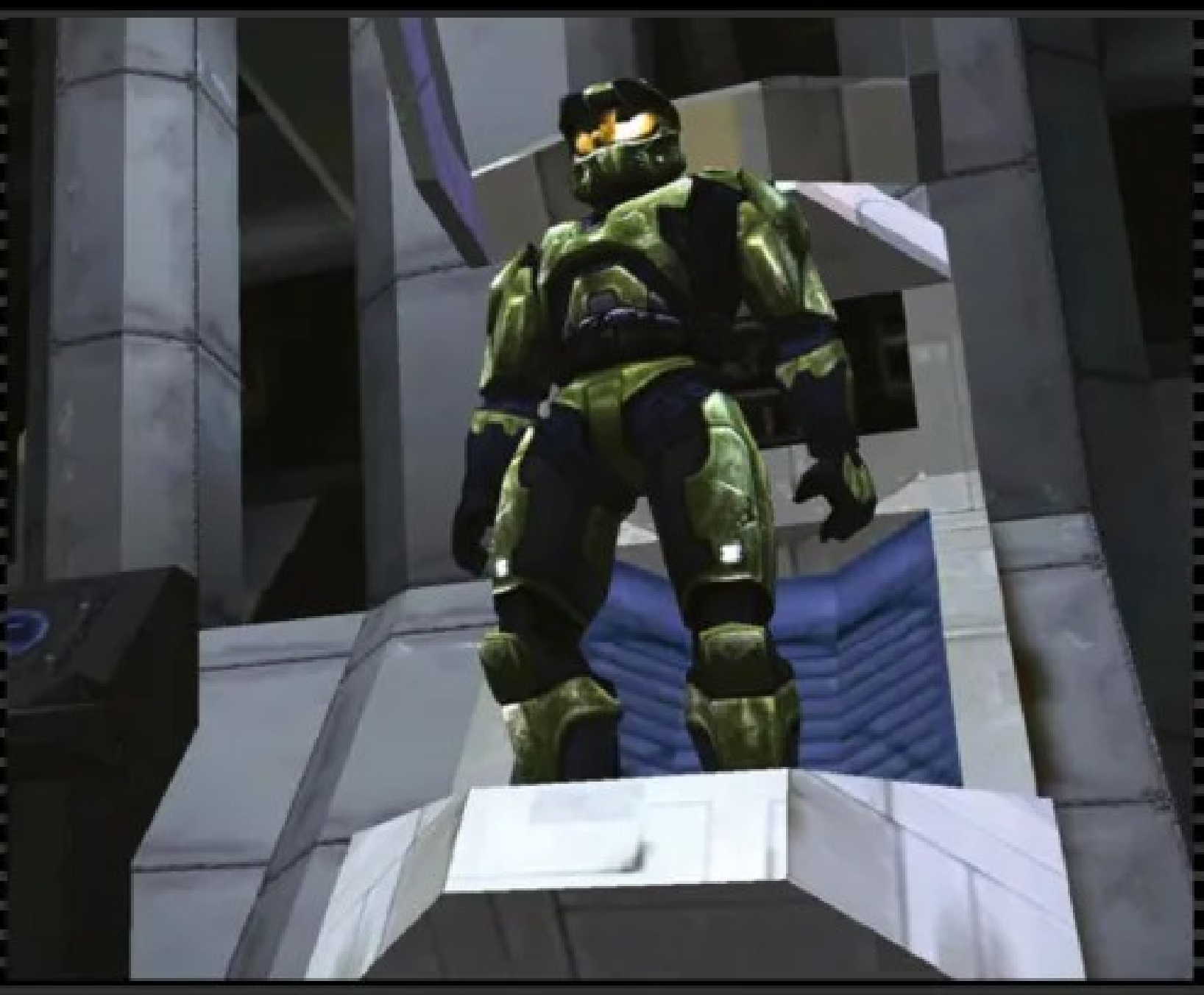
Physical and tactical prowess aside, it is the Master Chief's ability to inspire humankind that resonates most. With his iconic armour and imposing frame, he has become a symbol for the struggle that humankind faces in the *Halo* universe. Despite his origin as a force for humanity against itself, the Chief's role in the war marked him out as a saviour who, once paired with the AI, Cortana, transformed the war in humanity's favour. And it is his relationship with that artificial intelligence that evokes the most drama throughout the series. Re-acquainted aboard the Pillar Of Autumn at the start of *Combat Evolved*, their rapport is soon re-established as the pair exchange remarks on the bridge of the UNSC cruiser. "No thanks to your driving, yes," observes the Chief when Cortana enquires if he slept well. "So you did miss me," replies Cortana flirtatiously.

> **"Physical and tactical prowess aside, it's the Chief's ability to inspire humankind that resonates most"**

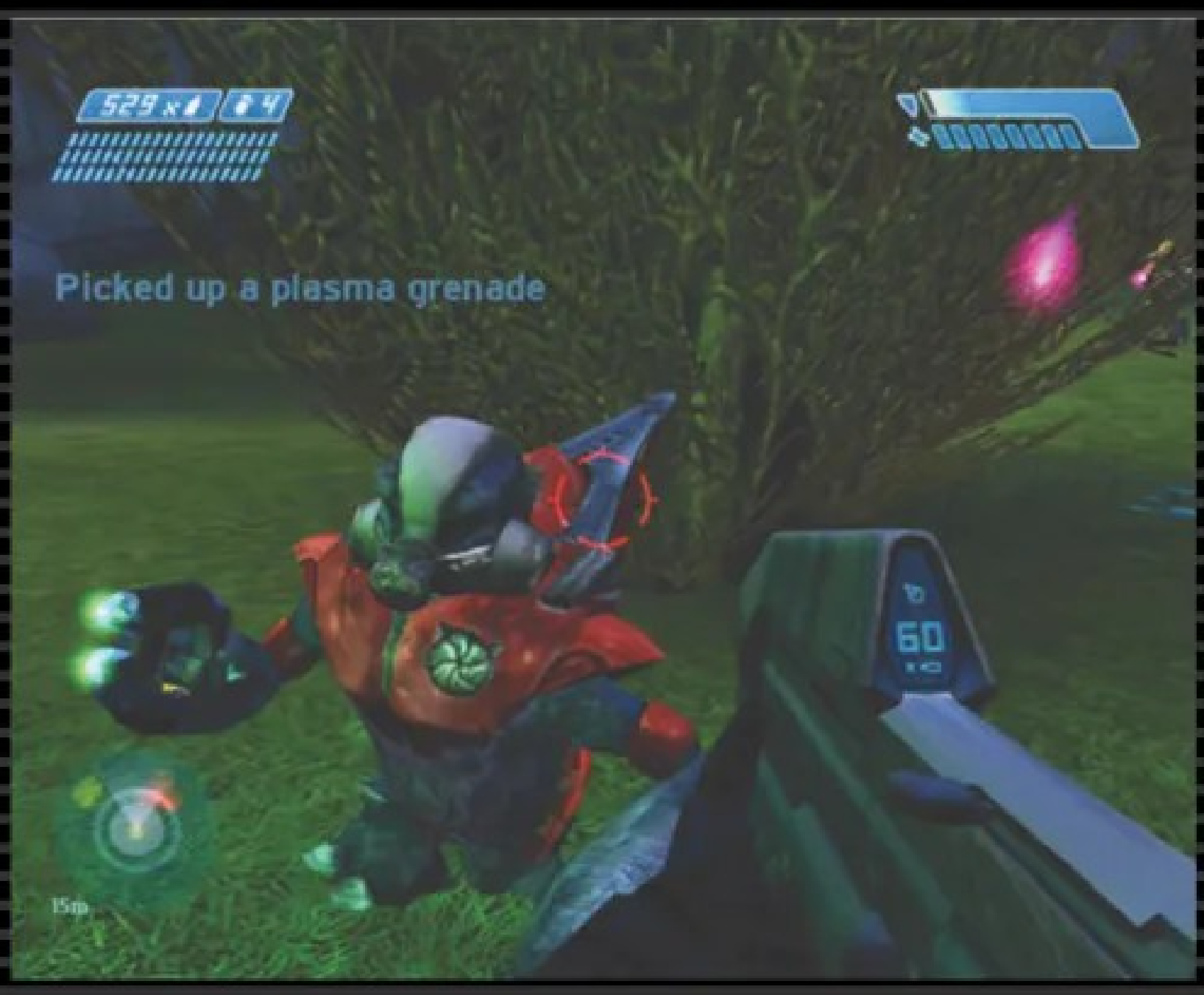
This relationship, after five main games in the series, is one of the few moments when the Master Chief shows any emotion. While the player is controlling him, he rarely speaks, even in cutscenes, proving as ruthlessly efficient in conversation as he is on the battlefield. The exception is when Cortana and the Spartan are reunited, with the former poking fun at his inscrutable tough-guy outer shell, adding humanity and personality to the super soldier deeply scarred by the loss of his friends on Reach, yet powered by a sense of duty to mankind.

It's no surprise that the Master Chief has become an icon of gaming, despite the mystery surrounding his appearance outside the Mjolnir suit. Enigmatic and resolute, his determination and unwavering faith in his own abilities exhibits a loyal and strong character that many of us aspire to. Feared by his enemies in equal measure to the admiration of colleagues, the Master Chief is a truly worthy entry into the hall of fame. ✱

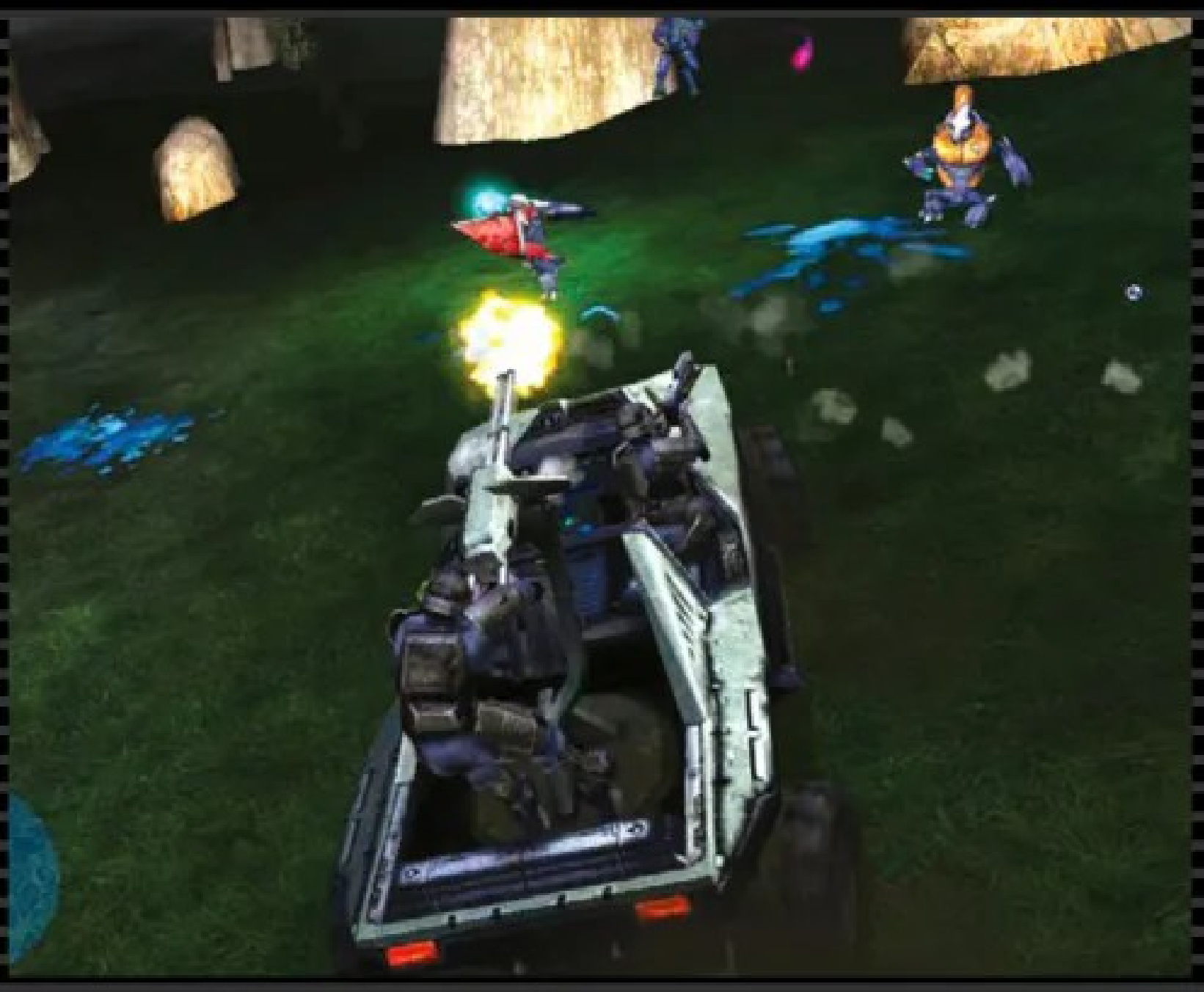
> MAGIC MOMENTS



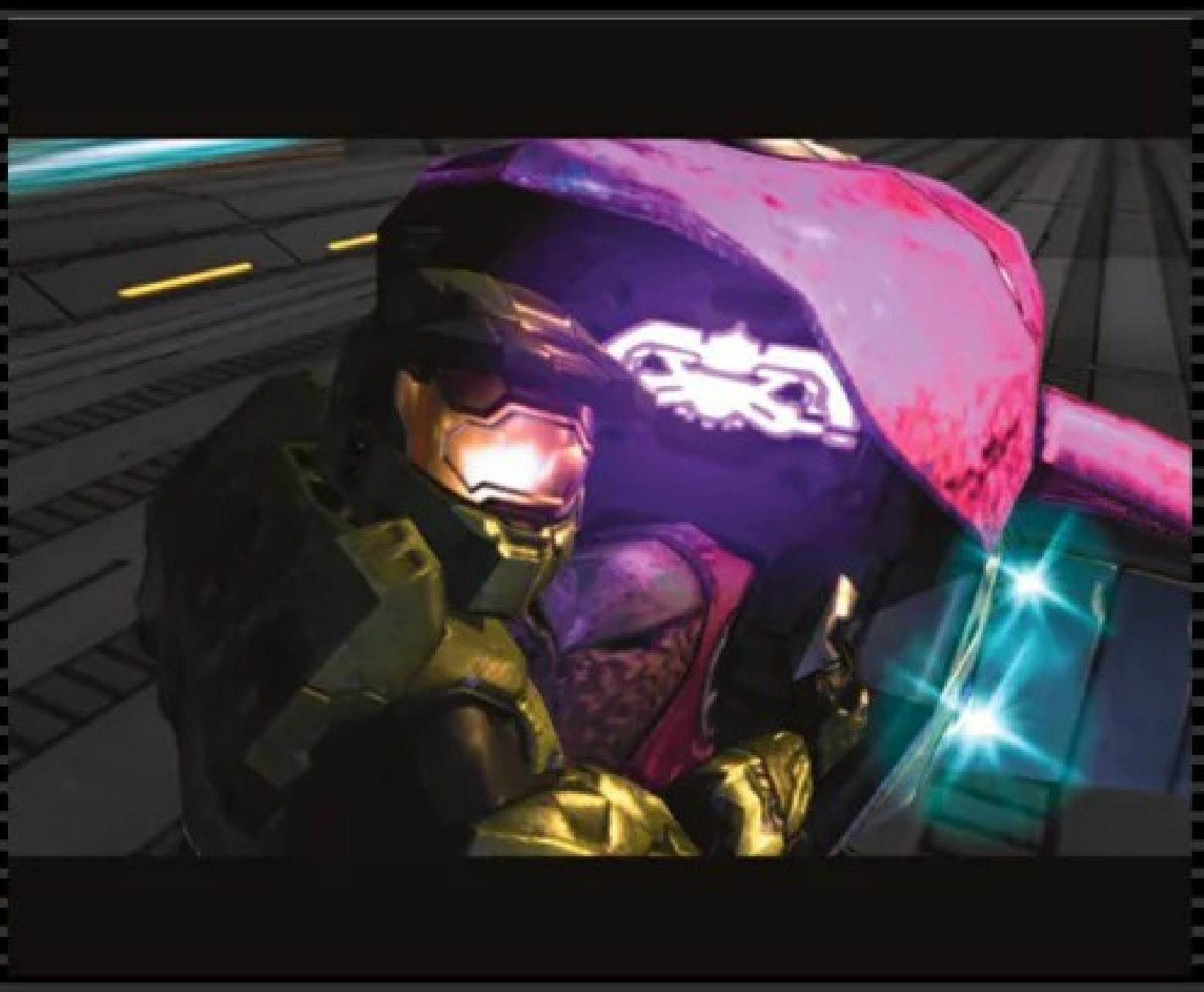
■ Encased in a cryonic sleep, the Chief is abruptly awoken at the beginning of *Combat Evolved*.



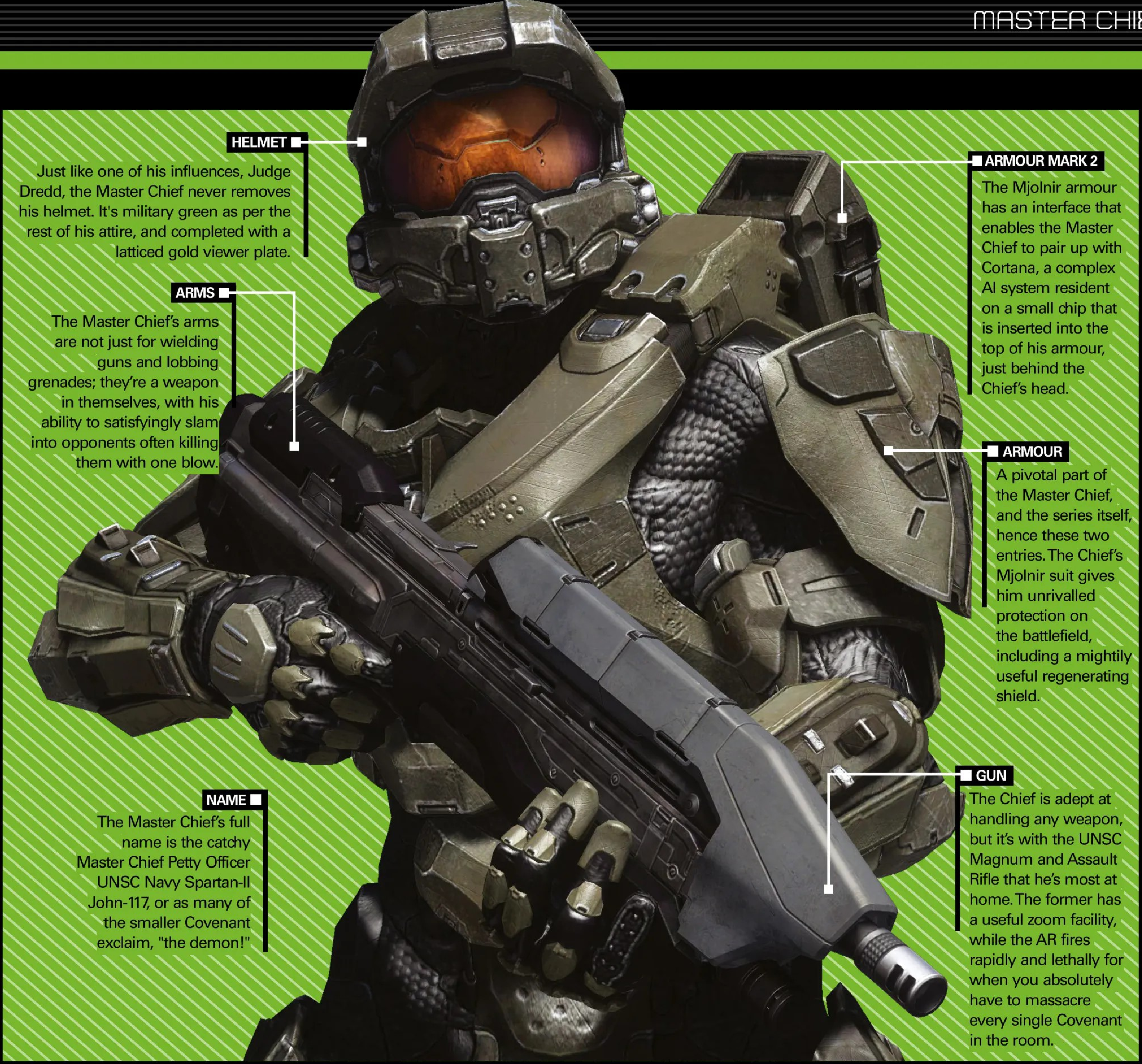
■ Watching smaller Covenant flee in terror as Master Chief approaches them never gets boring.



■ Love them or hate them, these sturdy 4x4s are the vehicular grunts of the UNSC.



■ Master Chief jumps into a Banshee in an attempt to even the odds.



HELMET

Just like one of his influences, Judge Dredd, the Master Chief never removes his helmet. It's military green as per the rest of his attire, and completed with a latticed gold viewer plate.

ARMS

The Master Chief's arms are not just for wielding guns and lobbing grenades; they're a weapon in themselves, with his ability to satisfyingly slam into opponents often killing them with one blow.

NAME

The Master Chief's full name is the catchy Master Chief Petty Officer UNSC Navy Spartan-II John-117, or as many of the smaller Covenant exclaim, "the demon!"

ARMOUR MARK 2

The Mjolnir armour has an interface that enables the Master Chief to pair up with Cortana, a complex AI system resident on a small chip that is inserted into the top of his armour, just behind the Chief's head.

ARMOUR

A pivotal part of the Master Chief, and the series itself, hence these two entries. The Chief's Mjolnir suit gives him unrivalled protection on the battlefield, including a mightily useful regenerating shield.

GUN

The Chief is adept at handling any weapon, but it's with the UNSC Magnum and Assault Rifle that he's most at home. The former has a useful zoom facility, while the AR fires rapidly and lethally for when you absolutely have to massacre every single Covenant in the room.

After crash-landing on Earth at the end of *Halo 2*, the Chief is rescued by UNSC forces.

Turning the tide by using the Covenant's own weapons against them is always satisfying.

The closest *Halo* comes to romance is between biologically engineered soldier and AI construct.

Now with a squad of Spartans, the team's arrival at Argent Moon is as dramatic as it is deadly.

LEGACY OF THE MASTER CHIEF

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

Having escaped from Reach, the Chief is rudely awoken from cryonic sleep when the Covenant attack his ship, Pillar Of Autumn. Escaping to the nearby ringed world together with the ship's AI, Cortana, he attempts to rescue the Pillar's captain before discovering the true deadly purpose of the Halo ring, ultimately destroying it.

HALO 2

The first sequel to the best-selling *Halo* introduces another playable character, the Covenant Arbiter, as well as civil strife and the Flood's tentacled leader, Gravemind. The Chief battles them all in *Halo 2* before returning to Earth at the game's conclusion.

HALO 3

Crashing in Africa, the Master Chief hooks up with UNSC forces as the Covenant invades, believing the area to contain the Ark, a device that controls the Halo rings. Activating a new, incomplete Halo, the flood is destroyed by the Chief, who makes his escape on the shattered rear half of a UNSC Frigate.

HALO WARS

Taking a side-step away from the traditional *Halo* FPS action, *Halo Wars* takes the characters, locations and weapons from the main series and replicates the universe into a real-time strategy game set approximately 20 years before *Combat Evolved*, with the location of the Chief at the time unknown.

HALO 3 ODST

Released as a standalone accompaniment to Halo 3, ODST follows a team of Orbital Drop Shock Troopers as they explore the ruined, Covenant-infested city of New Mombasa following the events of *Halo 2*. The fragile soldiers need careful guiding compared to the Master Chief, who is presumably busy elsewhere.

HALO: REACH

The Master Chief features only very briefly at the end of this superb prequel, making his escape in stasis via the Pillar Of Autumn. Considered by many as one of the best *Halo* games, *Reach* tells the story of the eponymous planet and its catastrophic demise at the hands of the Covenant.

HALO 4

Stranded in deep space after the events of *Halo 3*, the Master Chief and Cortana crash land (again) on Requiem, a Forerunner planet. Battling rogue Covenant forces, mechanical knights and Cortana's degrading mental state, the Chief accidentally releases the Didact, an imprisoned Forerunner, and must destroy this new threat before it transforms humanity into robotic flood-immune creatures.

HALO: SPARTAN ASSAULT / SPARTAN STRIKE

Following the end of the Human-Covenant war, rogue factions of alien species continue to harass humanity. In this twin-stick shoot-'em-up, the player controls a Spartan soldier as they attempt to repel the Covenant rebels and end the war for good. A sequel, *Spartan Strike* followed two years later.

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

Several months after *Halo 4*, *Guardians* tells the story of Blue Team, led by the Master Chief and comprised of Spartan-II super soldiers, and Fireteam Osiris, the group sent after them when they jet off to locate Cortana. Aboard a Forerunner Guardian ship and on alien planets, the teams face off as Cortana attempts to unite the galaxy.

HALO WARS 2

As with the original *Halo Wars*, the player is once more charged with constructing a base and collecting resources in this PC and Xbox One real-time strategy game. Although the Chief is nowhere to be seen again, there's a new antagonist in the form of the Banished, created in the power vacuum following the end of the Covenant.

HALO INFINITE

Hopefully releasing in 2021, *Halo Infinite* will continue the story of Spartan John-117, and it would appear he could well be coming up against his former sidekick AI Cortana following its machinations at the end of *Halo 5*. Hopefully we'll get to play the big green hero again soon.

SAM FISHER

Although Solid Snake has been sneaking around in videogames for the good part of 30 years, he's not the only master of stealth…

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** SAM FISHER
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** SPLINTER CELL
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** GHOST RECON: WILDLANDS
- » **FINEST HOUR:** SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** HEADWEAR

Sometimes iconic videogame characters are created by accident, sometimes their planning comes about after years of abortive attempts, and sometimes they're created for no other reason than to compete with a rival hero. Sam Fisher is one such example and he largely exists because of Solid Snake. According to an interview for IGN with Ubisoft Montreal's Yannis Mallat, Sam Fisher's origins start off in a game called *The Drift* at Ubisoft New York. Originally intended as a sci-fi game, a lack of focus saw the team change direction and they attempted to turn it into a new James Bond game. When that pitch failed, the New York office was closed down and its staff got relocated to Montreal. When Ubisoft teamed up with Red Storm (a studio cofounded by author Tom Clancy to make games based on his books), the team at Montreal revisited their abandoned game and realised it might be a good fit. The heads at Ubisoft HQ realised the same thing and gave the team a seemingly impossible task: make a *Metal Gear Solid 2* killer. The team set to work, and while the games of Hideo Kojima would become an obvious source of inspiration, the likes of *Thief, Deus Ex* and *System Shock* would also influence the team. *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* (to give it its full name) arrived in 2002 and proved to be an instant success thanks to its impressive graphics, engaging gameplay and extremely satisfying stealth mechanics. The hero of the moment however was arguably Sam Fisher, who proved to be a gruff counterpoint to Konami's Solid Snake, largely thanks to an excellent vocal delivery from Michael Ironside. The popular actor has portrayed Fisher onscreen for years, with the exception of *Blacklist*, which saw Eric Johnson take over the iconic role.

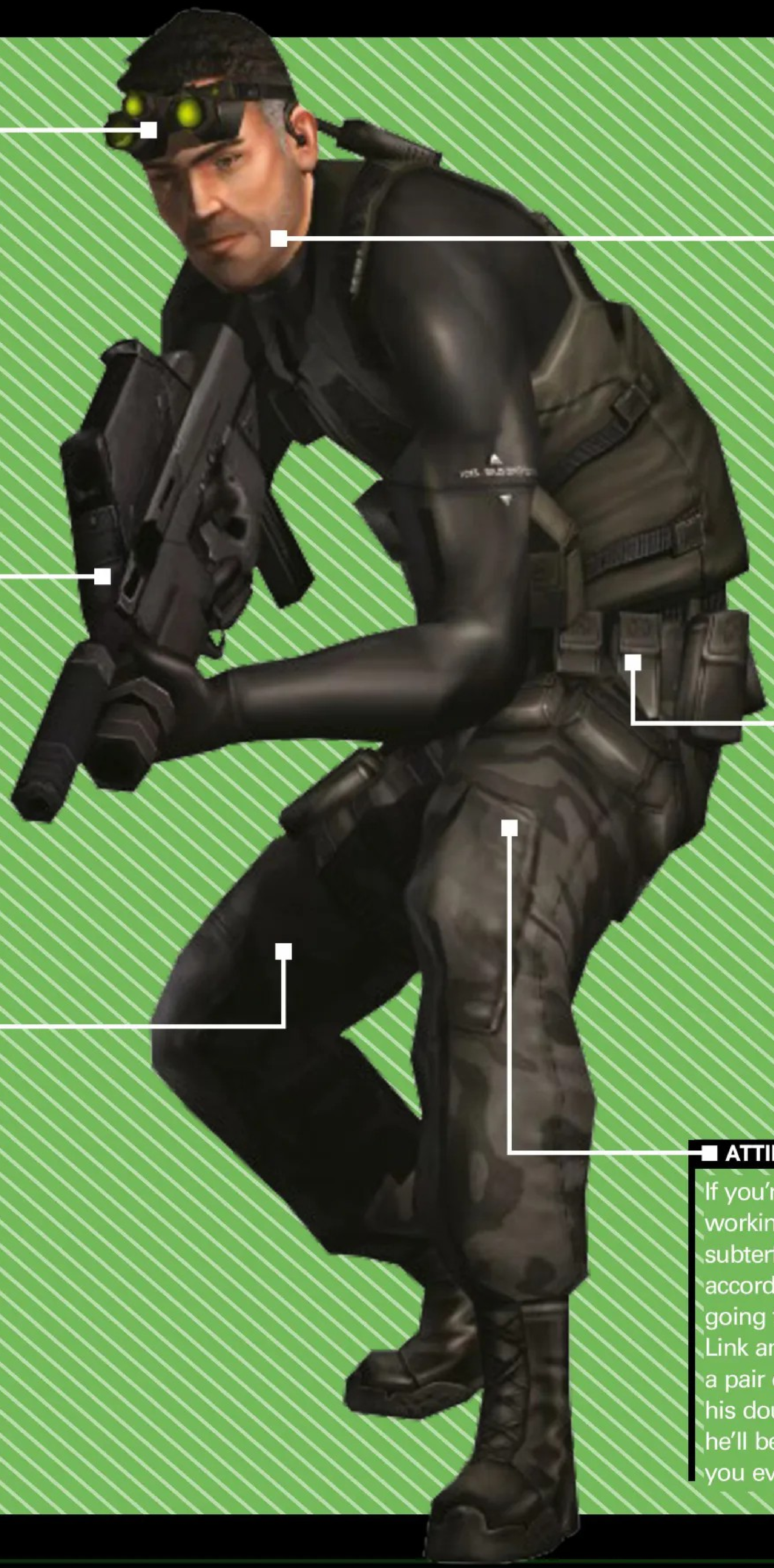
Like Solid Snake, Sam is a grizzled veteran and no stranger to fighting. He's also a master sneaker, showing off his impressive skills in the opening training stages of the original *Splinter Cell*. Despite being in his mid-forties, Sam is surprisingly spry for his age and is able to shimmy along ledges, climb up and down pipes and even perform a useful split-jump to allow him to drop on unwary enemies. Like many videogame characters he's more than equipped to shoot his way out of a situation, but he prefers using subterfuge over brute force and his many games have elements that are designed to be approached in a variety of ways. Stealth is typically Sam's best option however and as a result he has a large number of gadgets and gizmos to get him out of sticky situations. From his trusty multi-vision goggles to optic cables and retinal scanners, there's always something in Sam's arsenal that will allow him to get out of trouble and back on mission.

Another aspect of Sam Fisher we appreciate is that compared to a lot of his videogame peers, he's a surprisingly fleshed-out character. When he's not starring in videogames Sam has cropped up in seven novels, many of which tie in to or are based around his gaming adventures. In a nice sneaky touch, David Michaels, the author of the first six books, is actually a pseudonym for Raymond Benson, Grant Blackwood and Peter Telep. These novels, alongside the games, have given Sam a surprisingly complex background: so we know he grew up in the affluent suburbs of Towson, Maryland, has a bachelor's degree in political science, and had places in the US Navy and the Navy Seals before finding success in the CIA. Sam is largely a loner and his background has made it difficult to trust people. He prefers solitude over company and is highly loyal to the few friends he has, including his daughter, Sarah. These many traits and this expansive background make Sam an extremely believable character and one that you're constantly willing on to reach the end of each mission.

Ultimately, however, Sam Fisher has risen to gaming prominence, because like so many other characters featured in this book, he's starred in a number of truly exceptional videogames. He immediately proved that anything Solid Snake could do he could do just as well, and the close ties to Tom Clancy ensured that there's a believability to Sam's game world and character that is missing in so many similar titles. It's little wonder then that even his recent reveal for a brand-new generic mobile phone game by Ubisoft sent the internet into a frenzy of rabid excitement. ✱

» *Splinter Cell: Blacklist* was the most recent main game to star Sam Fisher. Rumours suggest it won't be the last.

» *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* has multiple endings. You'll need to be good to see them all.



MULTI-VISION GOGGLES

Sam's distinctive headwear is every bit as iconic as Solid Snake's bandana. They're not just for decoration however as they allow for thermal, EMF and night vision. Later games introduced more cool upgrades, including sonar and footprint tracking, making it even easier for Sam to track foes.

FN FIVE-SEVEN

While he's highly trained in a vast variety of different weapons, the FN Five-seveN pistol remains Sam's weapon of choice, and he uses it in every game. It's a highly versatile semi-automatic pistol that can be equipped with a silencer. It's the perfect weapon to use in case you need to rely on something other than stealth to finish a job.

ATHLETIC

Although Sam isn't a young man any more he remains extremely athletic and is a pretty spry guy for his age. In addition to being able to effortlessly sneak around (it must kill his knees) he's able to shimmy along and climb up pipes, clamber across bins and even use a handy 'split jump' to scramble up walls and get the drop on enemies.

VOICE

For many gamers Sam Fisher and Michael Ironside will be forever intertwined as one character. Ironside played Sam Fisher for the first five games and as a result was able to really flesh out the popular character. He returned to the role in 2018 for the crossover content that appeared in *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Wildlands*.

GADGETS

Sam Fisher has more cool gadgets than James Bond and Batman combined. Over the course of the series he's used a variety of useful gizmos that range from disposable picks and spy hacking devices to drones and optic cables. If a device is needed to finish a certain mission, chances are Sam will have access to it.

ATTIRE

If you're spending most of your working life dealing with intrigue and subterfuge then you need to dress accordingly. Sam Fisher is never going to be as snappily dressed as Link and you'll never see him sporting a pair of bright blue dungarees, but his dour choice of clothing means he'll be able to snap your neck before you even see him coming.

> MAGIC MOMENTS

■ Sam will do anything to get the mission done, even using a perp as a human shield.

■ A Game Boy Advance release proved that Sam's adventures worked equally well in miniature form.

■ Sam's skills transferred across incredibly well to multiplayer in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*.

■ Sam Fisher's latest appearance has been in DLC for *Ghost Recon: Wildlands*.

KRATOS

Since making his debut in God Of War, Kratos has showcased the best Sony has to offer through his spectacular epic battles

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** KRATOS
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** GOD OF WAR
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** GOD OF WAR (2018)
- » **FINEST HOUR:** GOD OF WAR (2018)
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** BEING ANGRY

Kratos' many violent encounters with the gods of Greek mythos are all traced back to his history as a Spartan warrior. About to lose in battle, Kratos calls on the Greek god Ares, pledging himself to his service in return for victory, which Ares grants, binding Kratos with his trademark weapon, the Blades of Chaos, at the same time. Kratos' relationship with Ares turns sour when he is tricked into murdering his own family and has their ashes bonded to his skin to give him his famous pale complexion and earn him the nickname, the 'Ghost of Sparta'. His quest for revenge against Ares is where we pick up our journey with Kratos in the 2005 PS2 title *God Of War* as he rampages through the realms of men and gods, eventually killing Ares and taking his place as the new God of War.

A combo system built on racking up ridiculously high numbers, epic boss fights against literal gods, and a penchant for ostentatiously violent QTE finishers combined to make the game a hit, ensuring Kratos' story would be continued.

So it was in 2007 with *God Of War II*. At the beginning of the game, Kratos loses his godhood and is killed by Zeus. On his way to the Underworld, Kratos is saved by the Titan Gaia, who sets him on a quest to find a way to travel back in time to the moment of Zeus' betrayal. Thus begins another quest of revenge for a notoriously angry man, during which we get to fight a host of mythological figures, including Theseus, Icarus and the Kraken, as the series doubled down on its jaw-droppingly spectacular boss battles. This game didn't take major steps forward in terms of its mechanics, but it did iron out the creases, making for a near flawless action experience.

> **“Kratos has found a new lease of life in the PS4 era”**

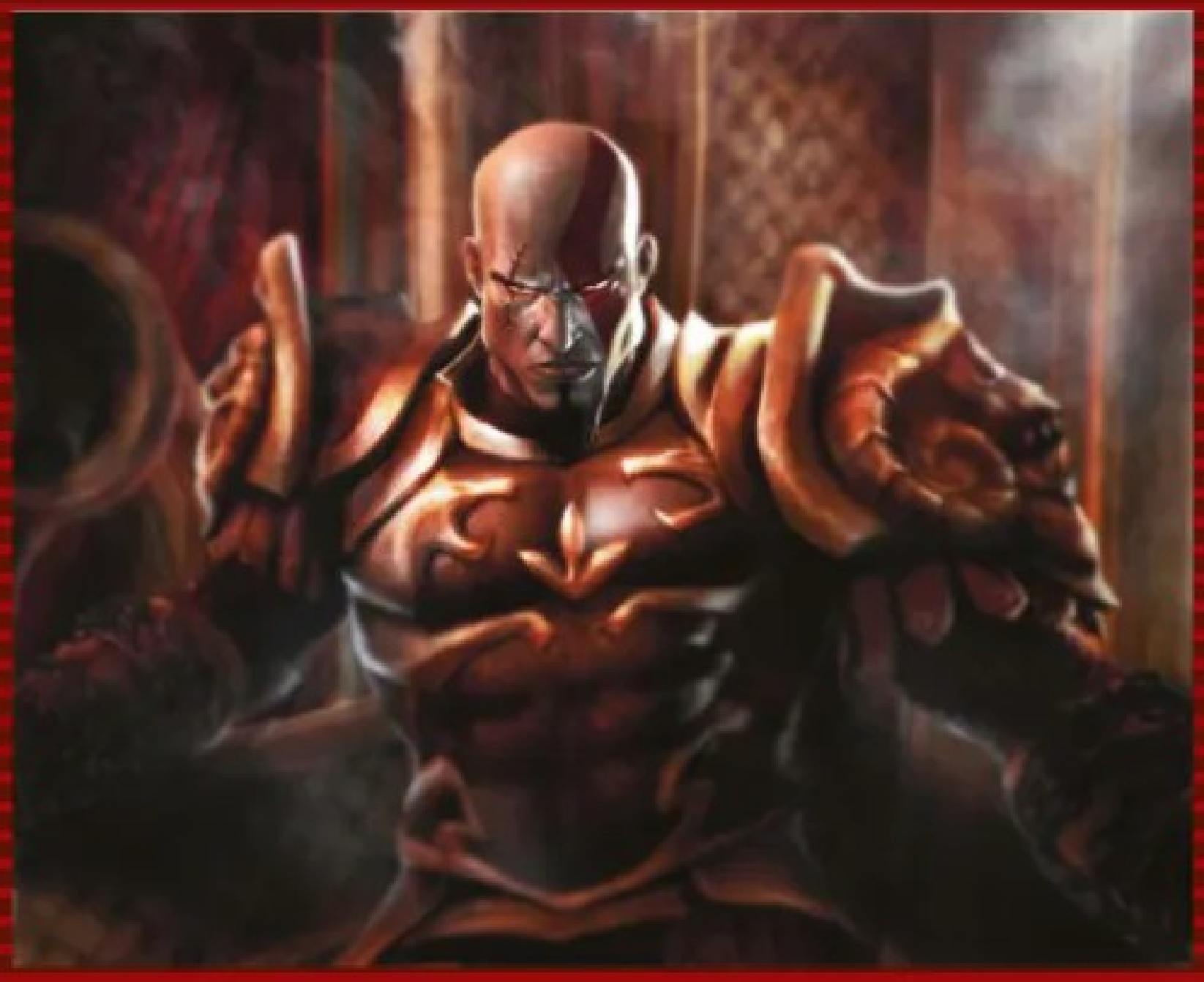
At the end of *God Of War II*, Kratos pledges to end the reign of the gods of Mount Olympus and that's where we pick up when *God Of War III* was released for the PS3 in 2010 as Kratos joins the Titans on a climb up the mountain of the gods. Taking advantage of the additional power of the PS3, this entry upped the scale of the exciting action combat the series was known for, blowing us away with stunning scenes as we battled against the likes of Poseidon, Hades and even Zeus himself. After defeating Zeus and seemingly ending the era of the Olympian Gods, Kratos, a character defined by his anger and violence, finally forgives himself for his past sins, sacrificing himself to give humanity hope.

Outside of these mainline titles, Kratos has starred in a number of spin-offs that fill in gaps in the character's story. 2008 PSP title *God Of War: Chains Of Olympus* is a prequel to the original game, and 2010's *God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta*, which also released on the PSP, tells the story of Kratos' attempt to find his missing brother, Deimos, after becoming the God of War. *God Of War: Ascension*, released on the PS3 in 2013, again goes back in the *God Of War* timeline to the moment when Kratos renounced his oath to Ares, tasking you with escaping from and defeating the three Furies who have imprisoned and tortured Kratos at Ares' behest.

Kratos has found a new lease of life in the PS4 era with his latest *God Of War* reboot. Kratos' rage-filled persona was a lot of fun to inhabit, but he was a bit one-note. That, along with the fact that he'd already slaughtered almost every god and creature in Greek mythology, led developers Sony Santa Monica to give us a new version of Kratos in a brand new setting. Set in a world of Norse gods, Kratos is now a father who has taken steps to control his rage for the benefit of his son, Atreus. Kratos and his son set out on a journey to scatter the ashes of Kratos' wife and Atreus' mother, whose last wish was to have her ashes scattered from the highest peak of the nine realms. This new setup has given Kratos – now sporting a big hipster beard and a hefty axe instead of his trademark Blades of Chaos – the opportunity to show more range as a character and further endear himself to fans. Of course, it's also offered up an excuse for some more epic god-based battles from a new mythological pantheon.

The game's bold re-imagining of Kratos is accompanied by an overhaul of the series' core mechanics, including a new over-the-shoulder camera and RPG-lite systems. It's been a roaring success. A character who looked like he might have been running out of places to go has been reinvigorated. It seems that his status as PlayStation standard bearer isn't over just yet. ✱

> MAGIC MOMENTS

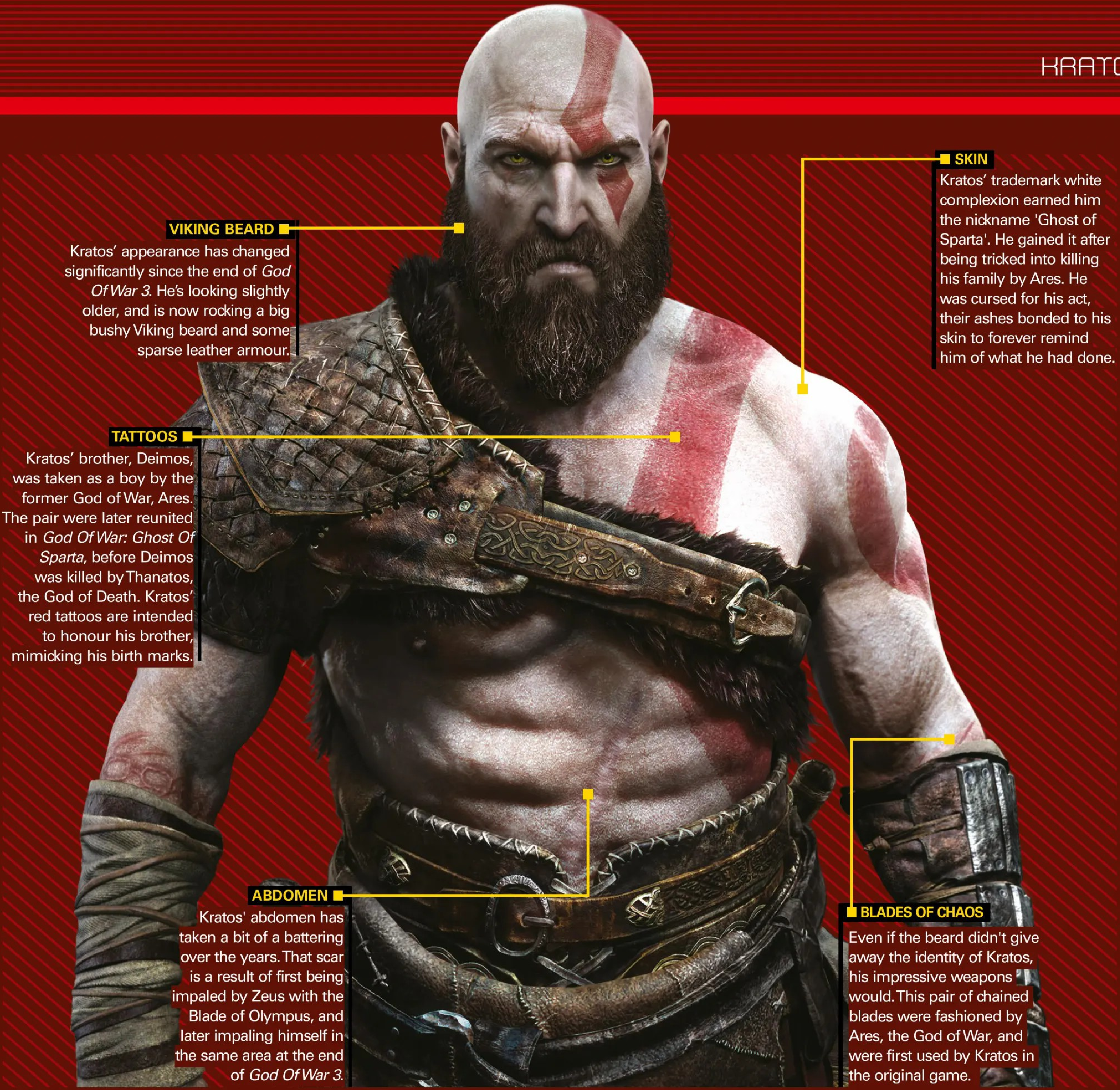


■ Kratos defeating a god as a mortal and taking his place as God of War is a defining moment.

■ Seeing Kratos team up with his son changed the game and gave us a new perspective on him.

■ Kratos' appearance in *Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny* was his first crossover.

■ *God Of War 3* asks you to hammer Circle to pummel Zeus into submission.



VIKING BEARD

Kratos' appearance has changed significantly since the end of *God Of War 3*. He's looking slightly older, and is now rocking a big bushy Viking beard and some sparse leather armour.

SKIN

Kratos' trademark white complexion earned him the nickname 'Ghost of Sparta'. He gained it after being tricked into killing his family by Ares. He was cursed for his act, their ashes bonded to his skin to forever remind him of what he had done.

TATTOOS

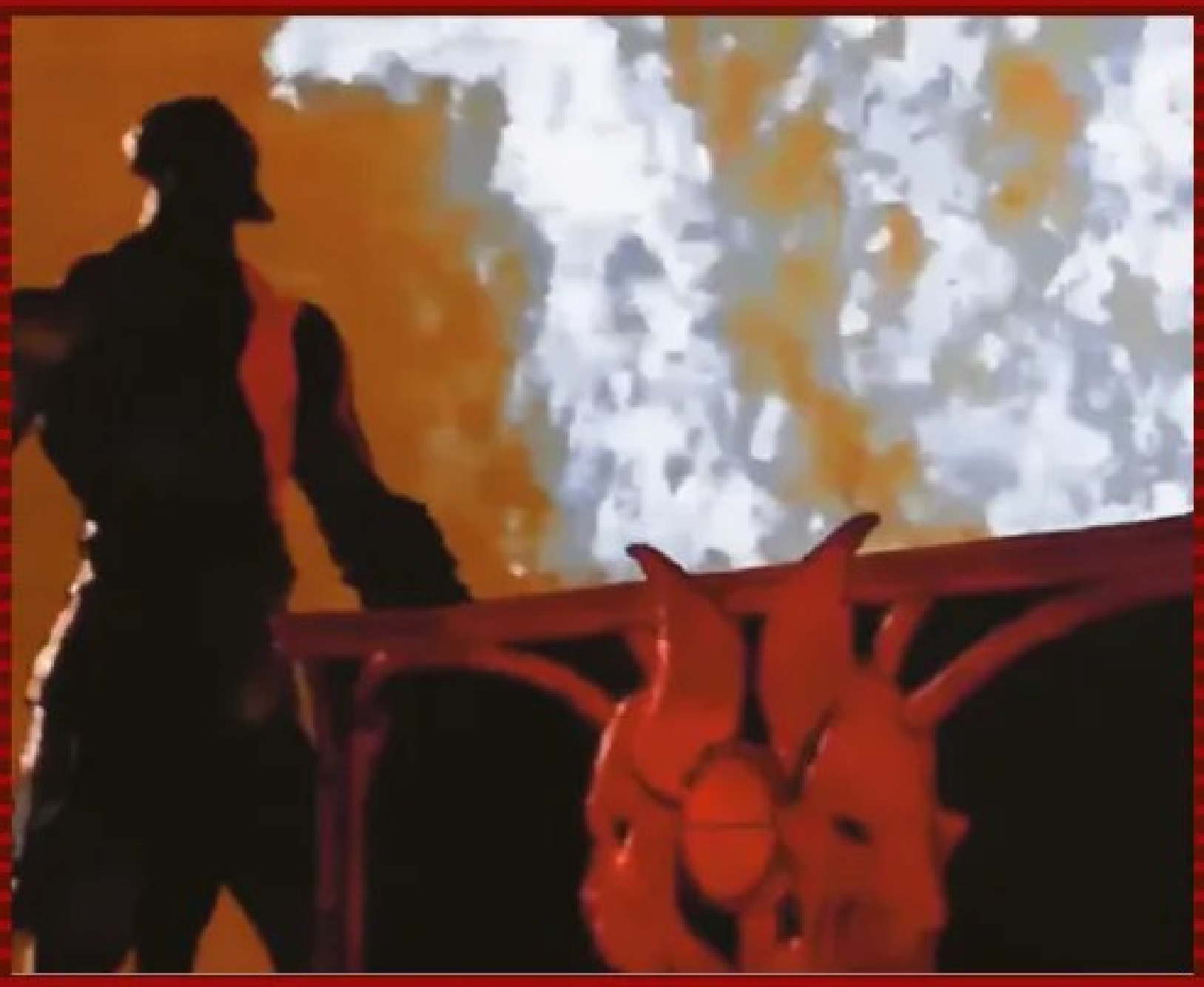
Kratos' brother, Deimos, was taken as a boy by the former God of War, Ares. The pair were later reunited in *God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta*, before Deimos was killed by Thanatos, the God of Death. Kratos' red tattoos are intended to honour his brother, mimicking his birth marks.

ABDOMEN

Kratos' abdomen has taken a bit of a battering over the years. That scar is a result of first being impaled by Zeus with the Blade of Olympus, and later impaling himself in the same area at the end of *God Of War 3*.

BLADES OF CHAOS

Even if the beard didn't give away the identity of Kratos, his impressive weapons would. This pair of chained blades were fashioned by Ares, the God of War, and were first used by Kratos in the original game.



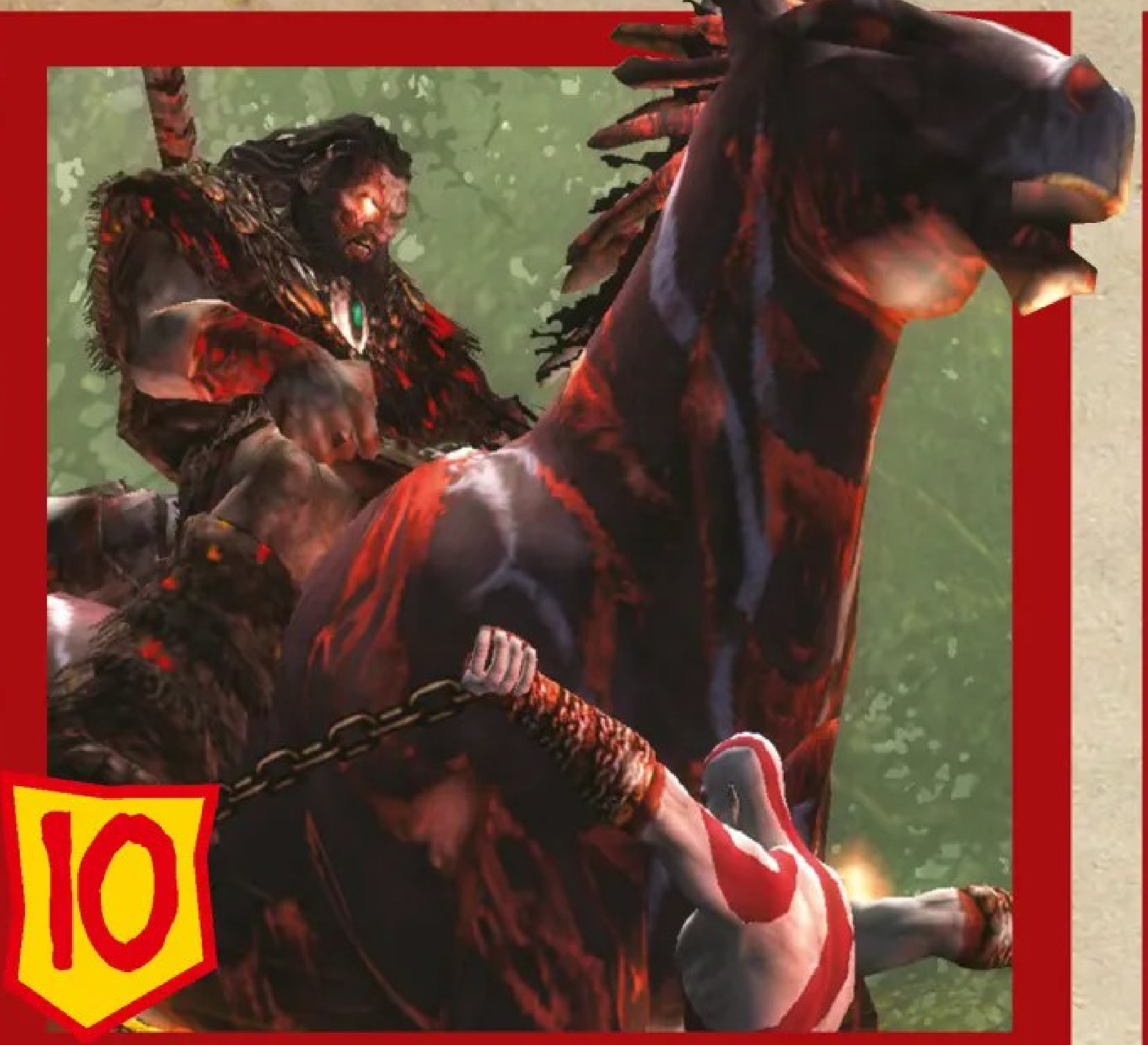
■ Opening Pandora's Box and growing to god-like size is one of Kratos' many epic moments.

■ The opening to *God Of War 3* is one of the most stunning in any PS3 game.

■ In 2018's *God Of War*, there is a fantastic moment that calls back to the original games.

■ When you first hop realms in 2018's *God Of War*, you realise the true scale and beauty of the game.

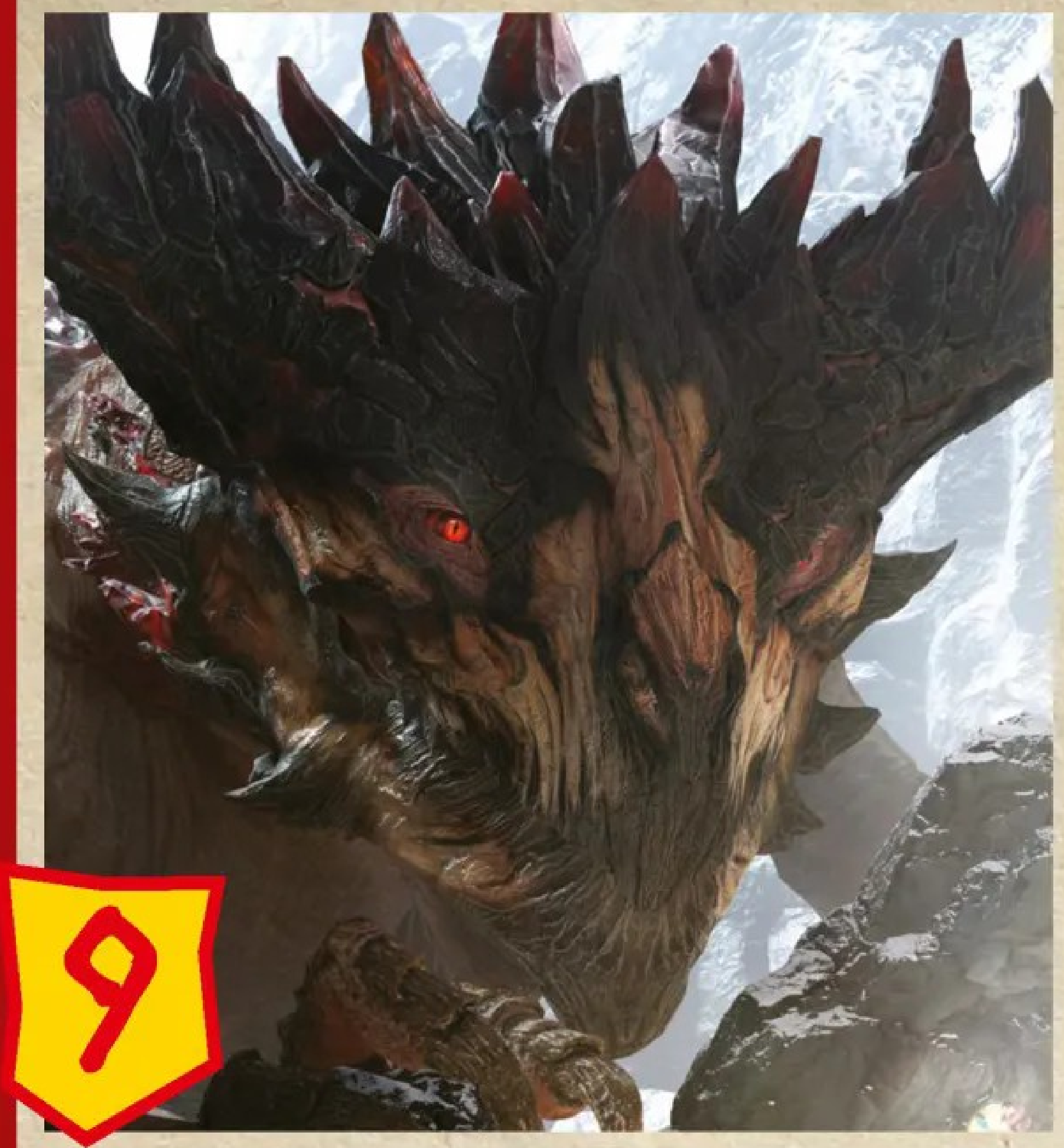
10 GOD OF WAR BOSSES



10

ALRIK THE BARBARIAN KING

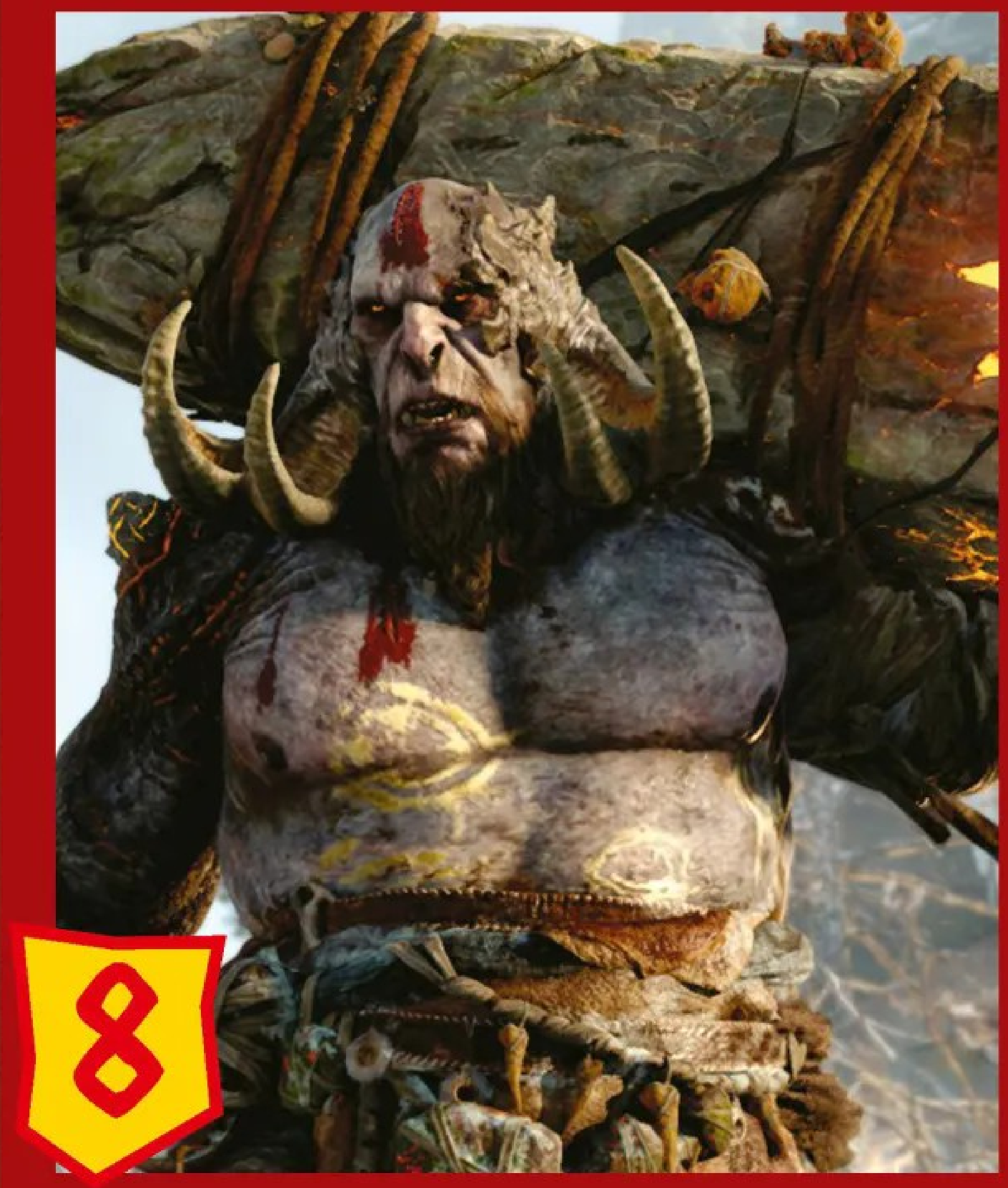
■ **God Of War 2 -** It was Kratos' encounter with the Barbarian King, in which he was set to suffer his first defeat in battle, that kick-started his whole story, giving him the motivation to pledge his service to Ares in return for victory. That's why its a cool moment when the Barbarian King returns to get revenge on Kratos in *God Of War 2*.



9

HRAEZYLR

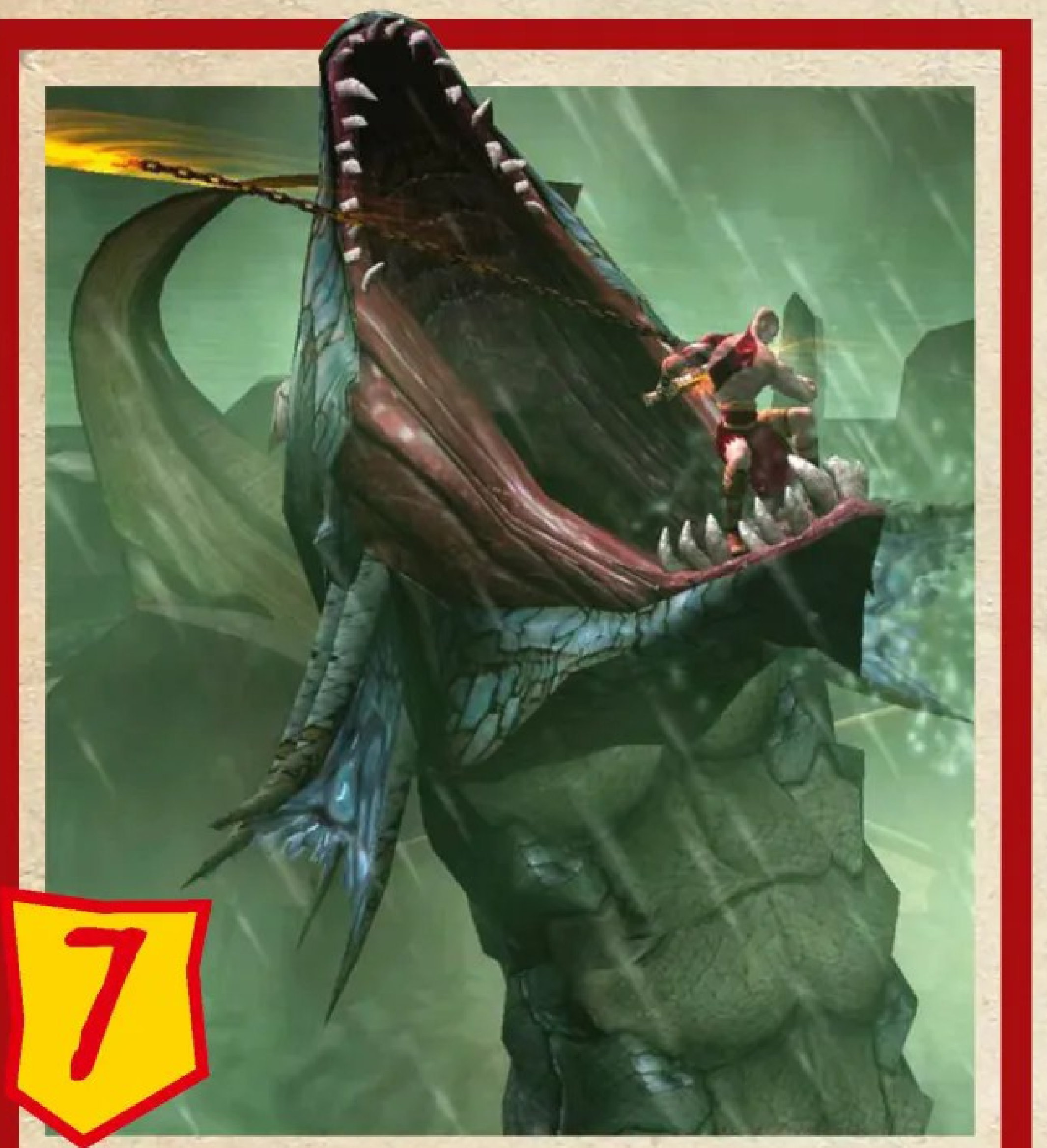
■ **God Of War (2018)** Given that the series is known for its epic boss fights, getting to take on a dragon is exactly the kind of thing we wanted from the *God Of War* reboot. Kratos starts the fight by slashing at the dragon's tongue from inside his mouth, then takes it to the ground, before ending up tearing a huge chunk out of its neck.



8

DAUÐI KAUPMAÐR

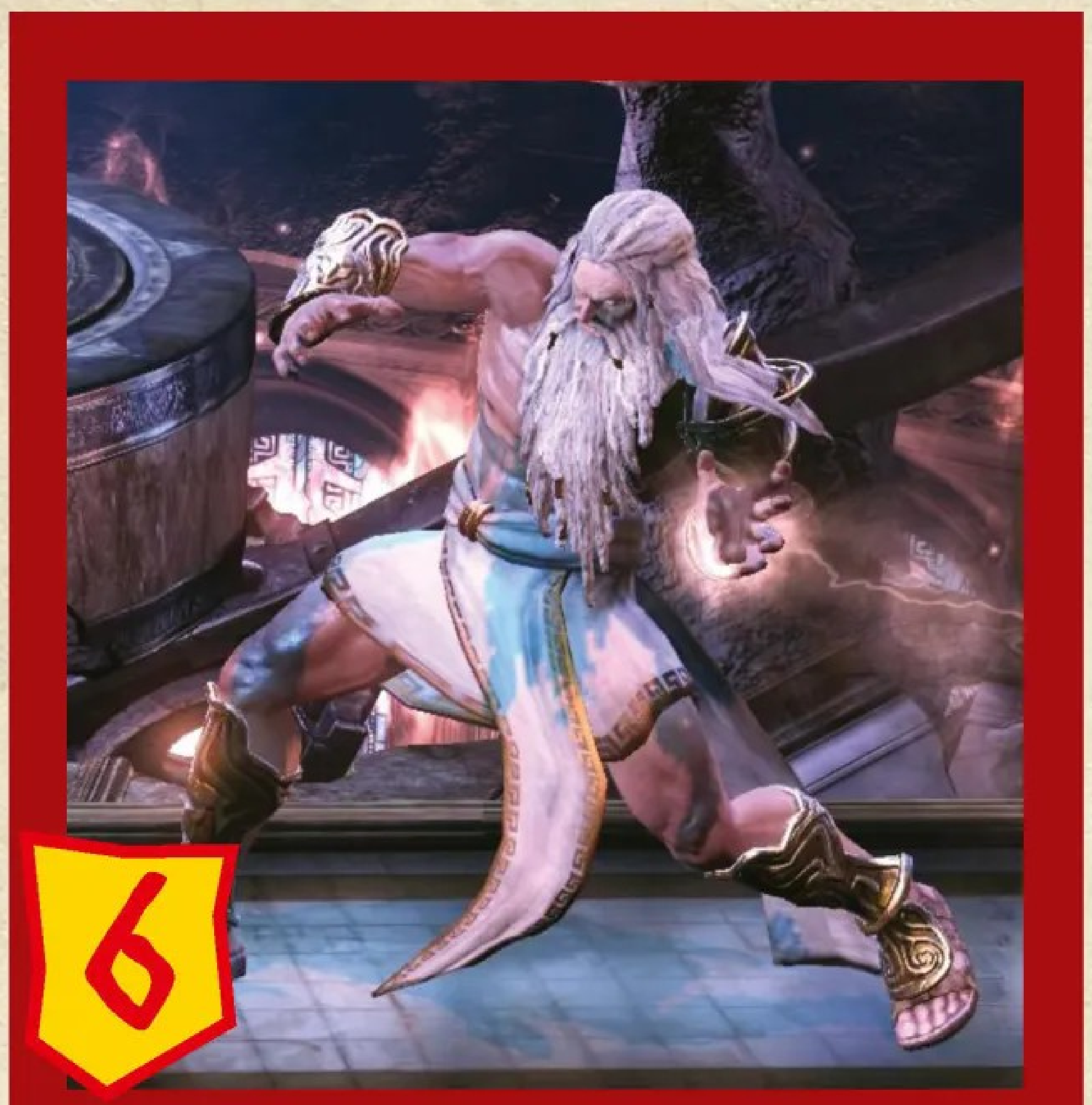
■ **God of War (2018)** Our first boss encounter in the new *God Of War*, this boss is a look at what the game has in store – he's the first of many boss trolls you will have to take out throughout the game, and an early opportunity to play with the game's new take on combat.



7

HYDRA

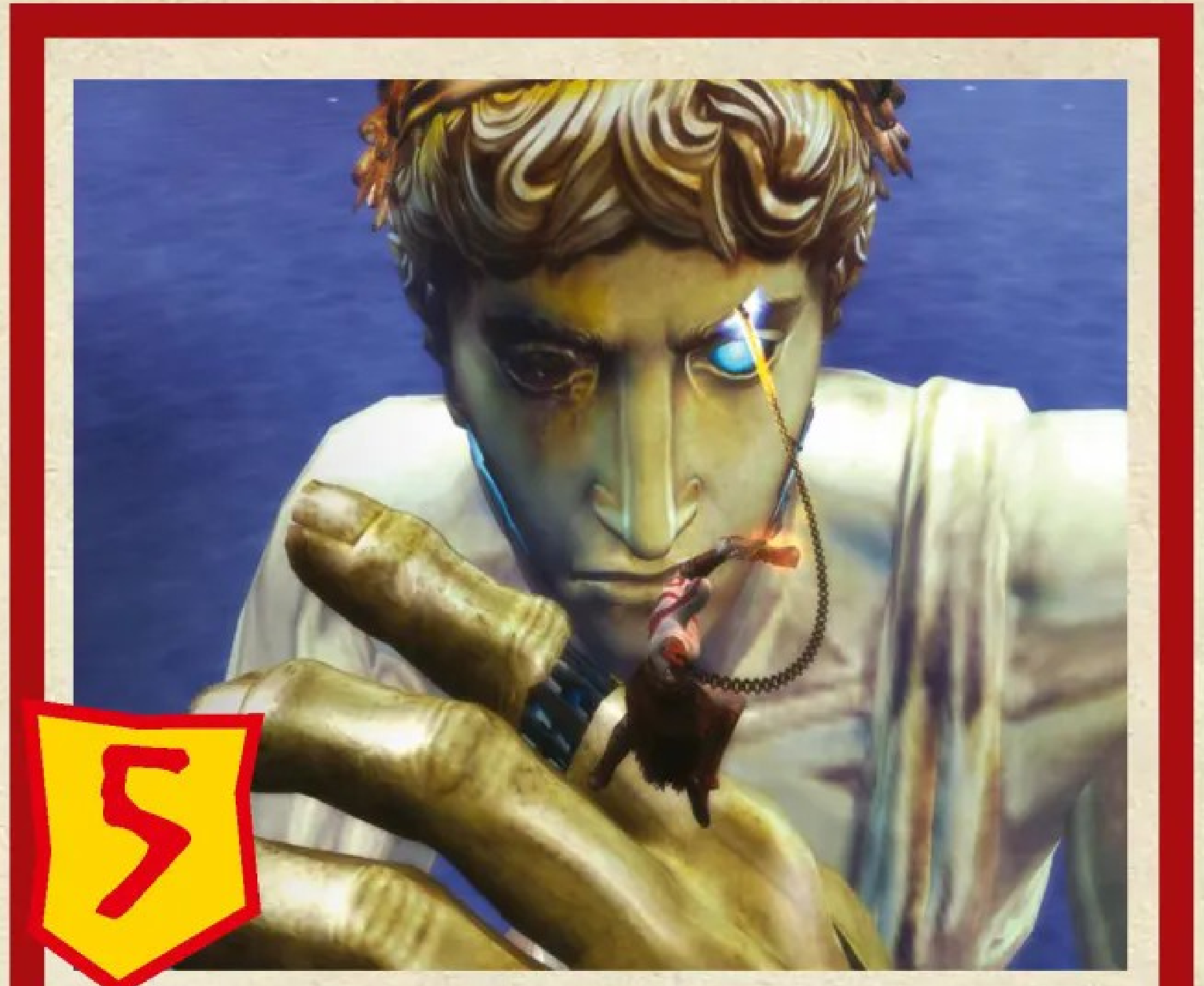
■ **God Of War** Not only was it a stunning opening to kick off *God Of War*, the boss battle against the Hydra set the template for everything that was to come. It's a truly epic fight against a cool legendary creature that ends with the kind of characteristically brutal QTE execution that would become a hallmark of the *God Of War* series.



6

ZEUS

■ **God Of War 3** The final fight against Zeus in *God Of War 3* is partly made by the huge build-up to it throughout the series' story, including Kratos' murder by Zeus and his ascent from the depths of Hades. The fight includes multiple phases, is punctuated by Kratos taking out the Titan Gaia, and ends with a brutal pummelling that gives you cause to reflect on Kratos' violent nature and your own embrace of it.



5

COLOSSUS OF RHODES

■ **God Of War 2** In a stunning sequence from *God Of War 2*, Zeus animates the Colossus of Rhodes in an attempt to kill Kratos. The boss fight is essentially a whole level that sees you battle your way through the city, fighting standard enemies, avoiding the boss's attacks and chipping away at it piece by piece. Eventually, Kratos drains his godly power into the Sword of Olympus, cuts his way inside the Colossus and destroys it from inside.

THAT DEFINED THE SERIES

4

HADES

■ **God Of War 3** No one escapes from the Underworld. No one except for Kratos, that is. In *God Of War 3*, his quest for vengeance requires him to return from the Underworld, which means defeating its master, Hades. It's a fantastic fight with multiple stages that ends with you taking Hades' own weapon, the Claws of Hades, to use for the rest of the game.

3

BALDUR

■ **God Of War (2018)** While we traditionally associate the epic nature of *God Of War*'s boss fights with the scale of the enemies Kratos takes on, this boss is a great example of how the series can stun us with brutal battles against foes the same size as Kratos. The thrilling series of encounters with Baldur are the best that the rebooted *God Of War* has to offer.

2

POSEIDON

■ **God Of War 3** Part of a stunning opening sequence in *God Of War 3*, this fight happens as you climb Mount Olympus. It begins with you battling a gigantic watery sea horse on the body of the Titan Gaia, with Gaia aiding you in the battle. It ends with Kratos unleashing his rage on the battered god and gouging his fingers into his eyes. Eww.

1

CRONOS

■ **God Of War 3** We've talked about Kratos' many epic encounters, but none are more epic than this classic fight from *God Of War 3*. The battle takes place on Cronos himself, whose size dwarfs the comparatively ant-like Kratos. You tear off his fingernails, battle enemies across his body, get swallowed, cut up his insides, send a huge spike through the poor Titan's jaw and then stab him in the head with the Blade of Olympus.

Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

THE LARA CROFT ALTERNATIVE

» RETROREVIVAL

» PS3 » 2007 » NAUGHTY DOG

It's mad to think that Nathan Drake's first game was two generations ago. Created by Naughty Dog and released in the winter of 2007, it was designed to show off the power of Sony's PS3, and also introduced the aforementioned Drake, a roguish, charismatic hero who was based on daredevil, Johnny Knoxville, the countless heroes of dozens of pulp magazines, and the actor Harrison Ford.

Ultimately, however, Nathan Drake's likeable and believable character is fleshed out through the excellent work of Nolan North, who not only gives Drake his distinctive voice, but also delivers all the motion capture. The end result makes Nathan Drake one of the most memorable videogame icons of recent times. Sure, he's as liable to stop you with a bullet as he is to throw a quip at you, but Drake does have something of a moral compass and he rarely shoots anyone that doesn't shoot at him first.

Of course, you can be the most likable videogame persona of all time and it means nothing if the games you are in don't impress. Fortunately, *Drake's Fortune* was a solid debut, and while it did little more than riff off the earlier adventures of Lara Croft and add the over-the-shoulder shooting of triple-A hits such as *Resident Evil 4* and *Gears Of War*, the stunning-looking visuals, great cinematic cutscenes (so great that my wife, Melanie, watched the entire game) and charismatic voice cast all helped to push the game past a million sales after ten short weeks.

Drake, alongside mentor Victor Sullivan and long-term partner, Elena Fisher, would go on to appear in ever-more spectacular sequels and far bigger sales success, but the original will always have a special place in my heart, and it's mainly because you could see all the key ingredients for something really special being put together. Developers outside of Naughty Dog simply don't make characters like Nathan Drake anymore, and it's quite possible that they never will. ✱

ICON PROFILE

- » **NAME:** NATHAN DRAKE
- » **FIRST APPEARANCE:** UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE
- » **LAST SEEN IN:** UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
- » **FINEST HOUR:** UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES
- » **NOTABLE FOR:** HANGING OFF STUFF

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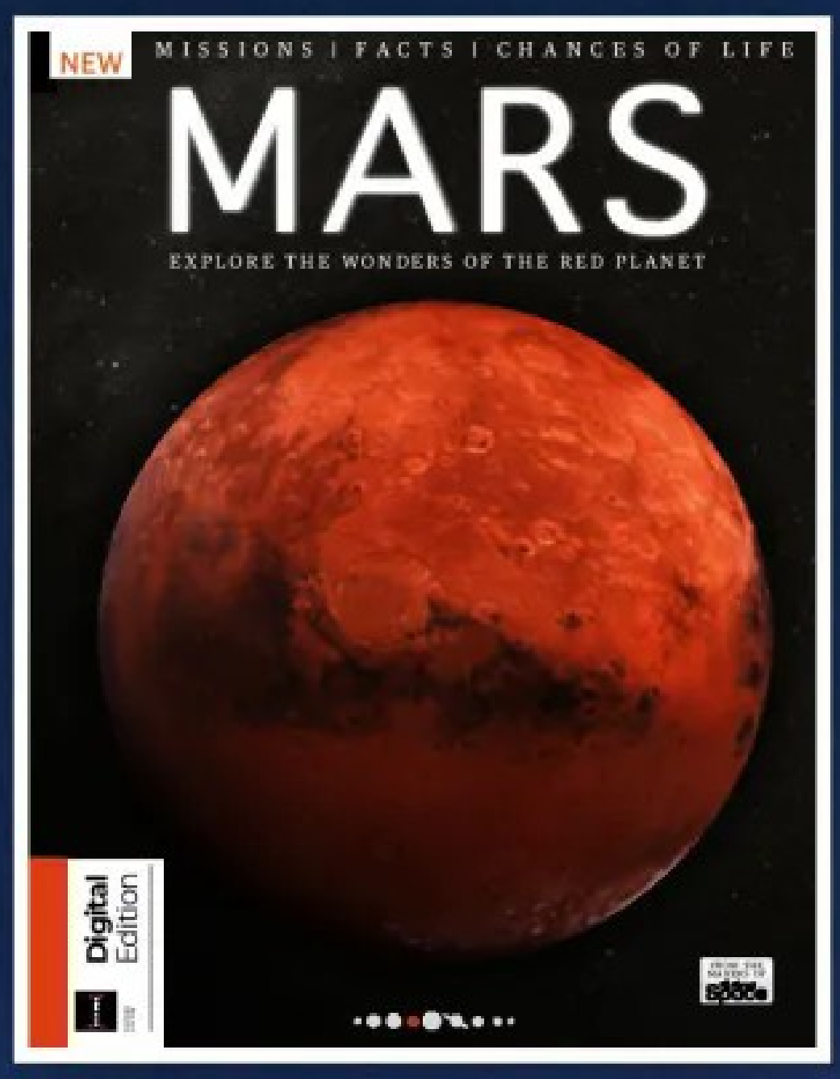
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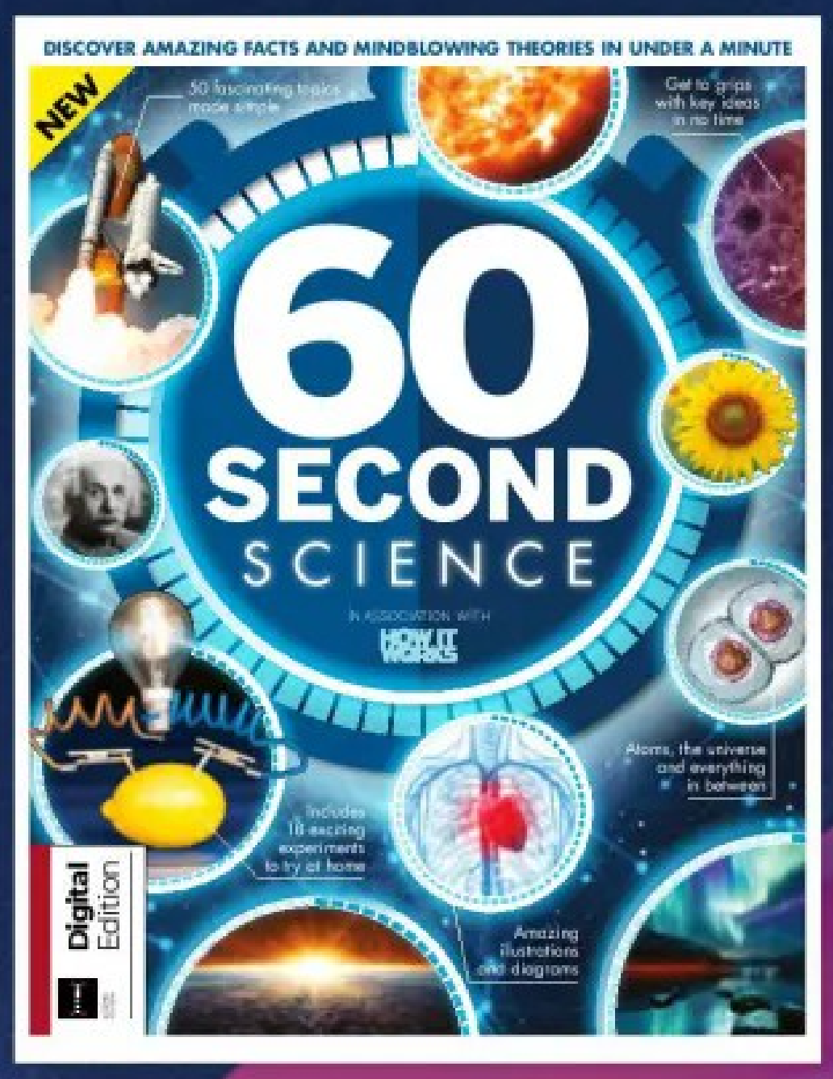
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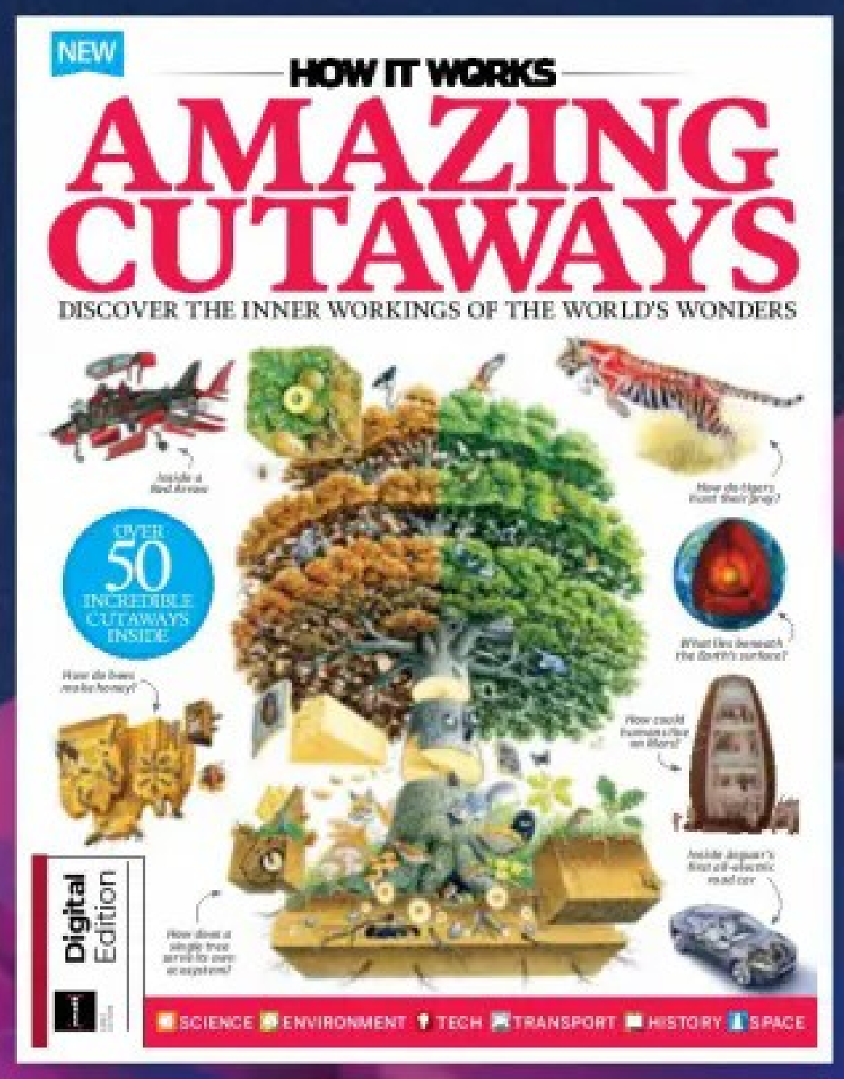
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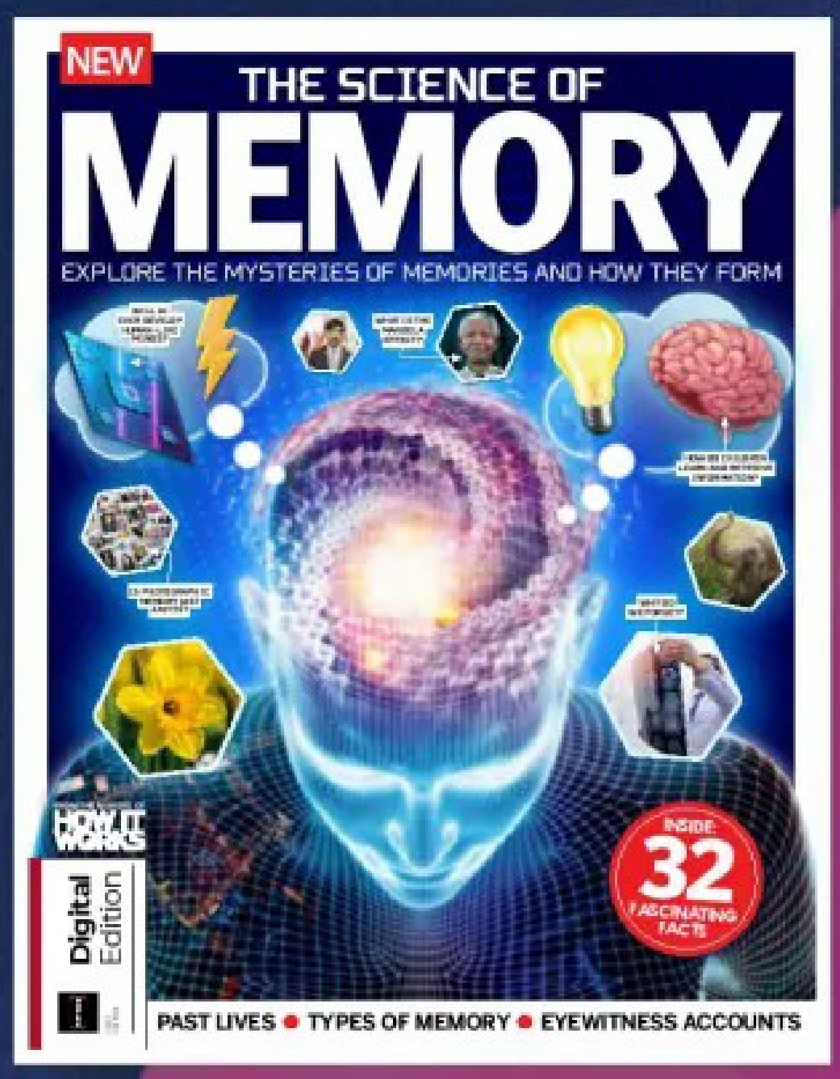
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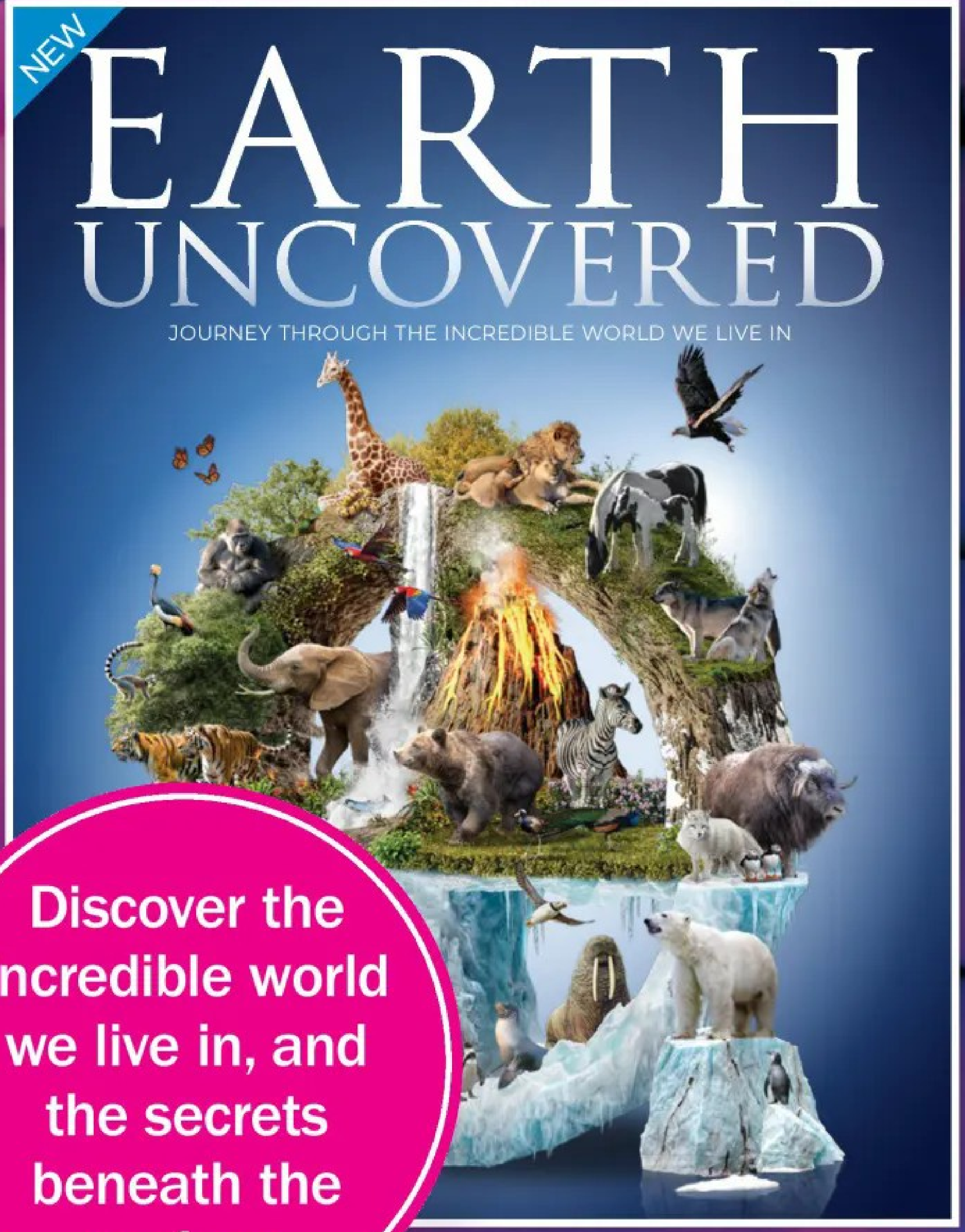
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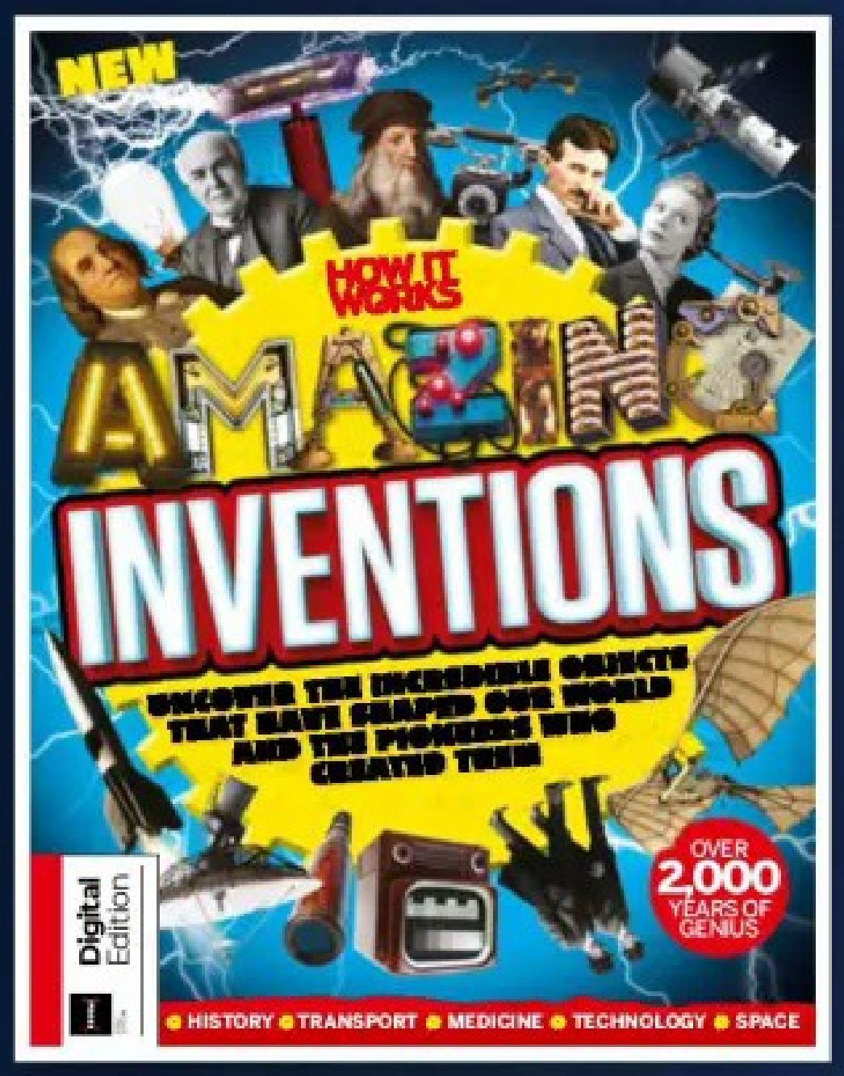
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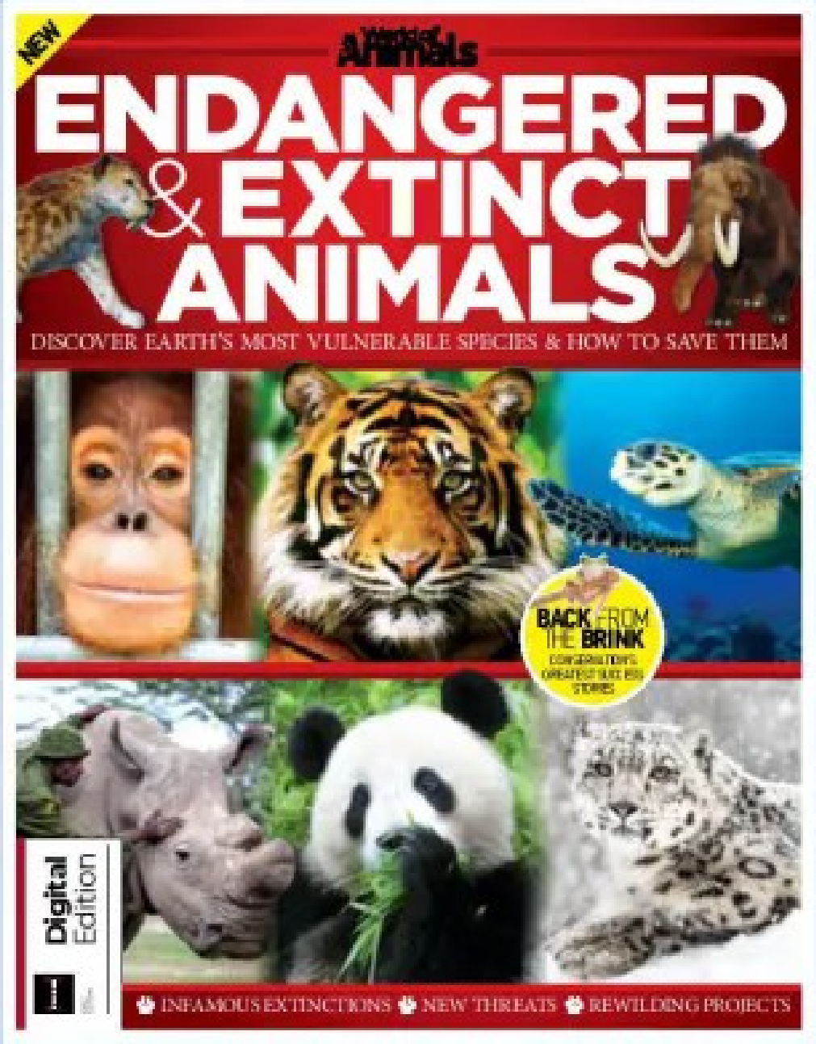
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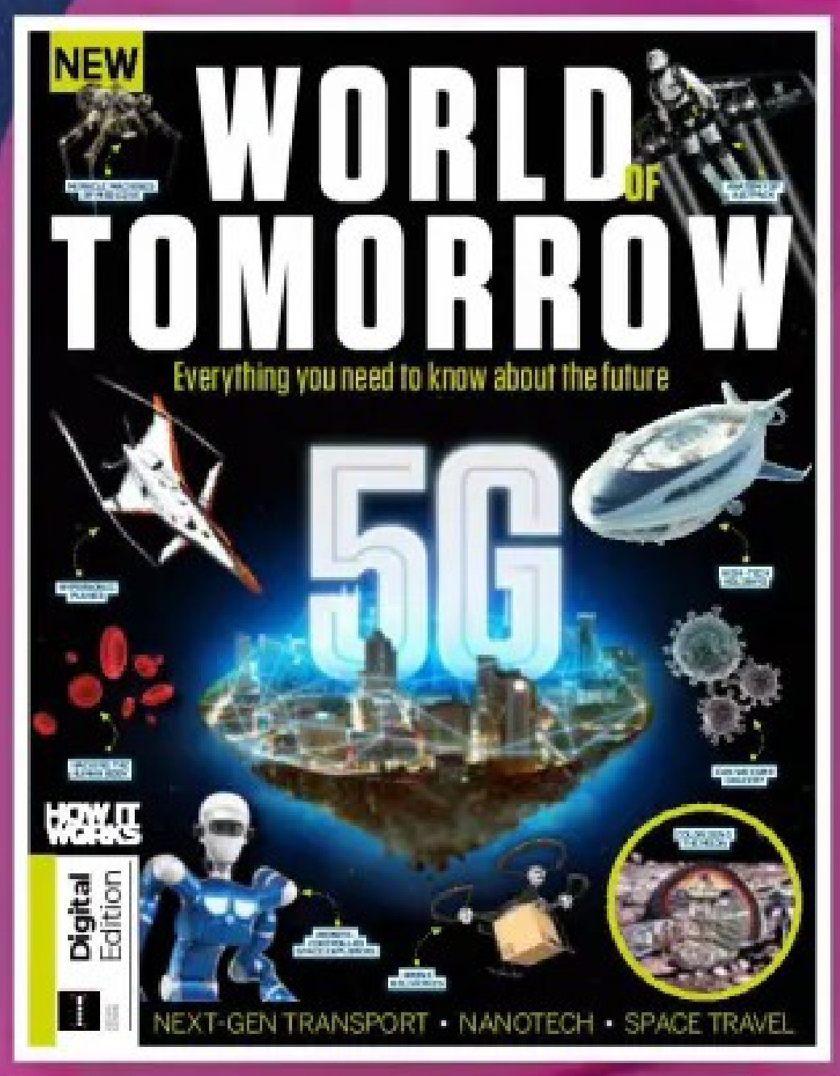
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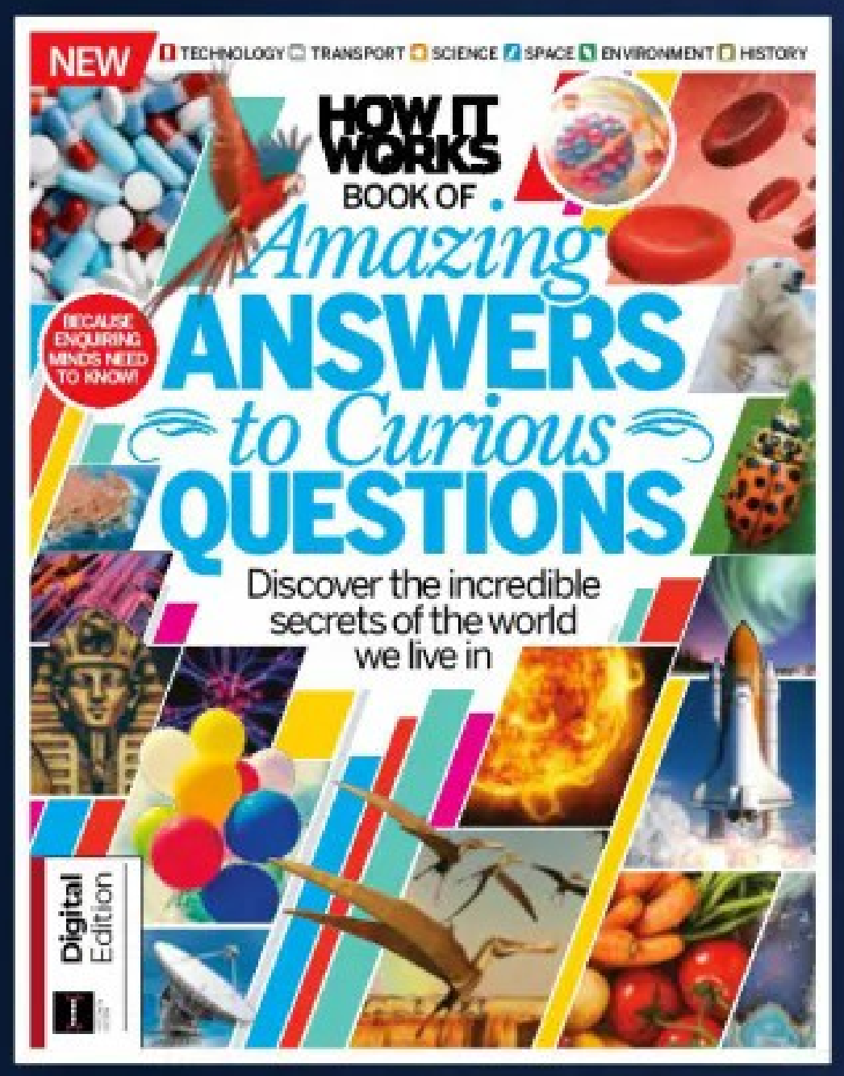
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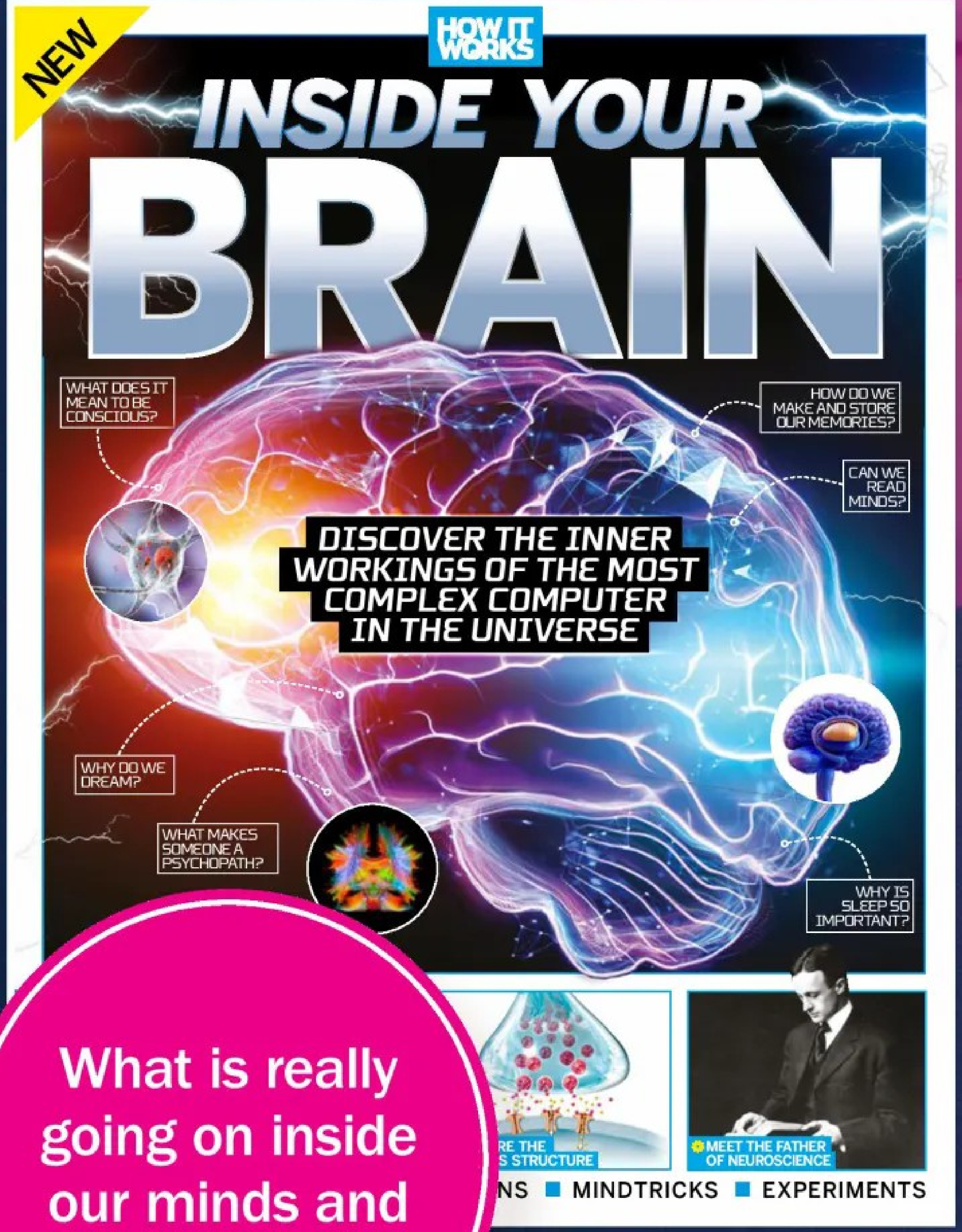
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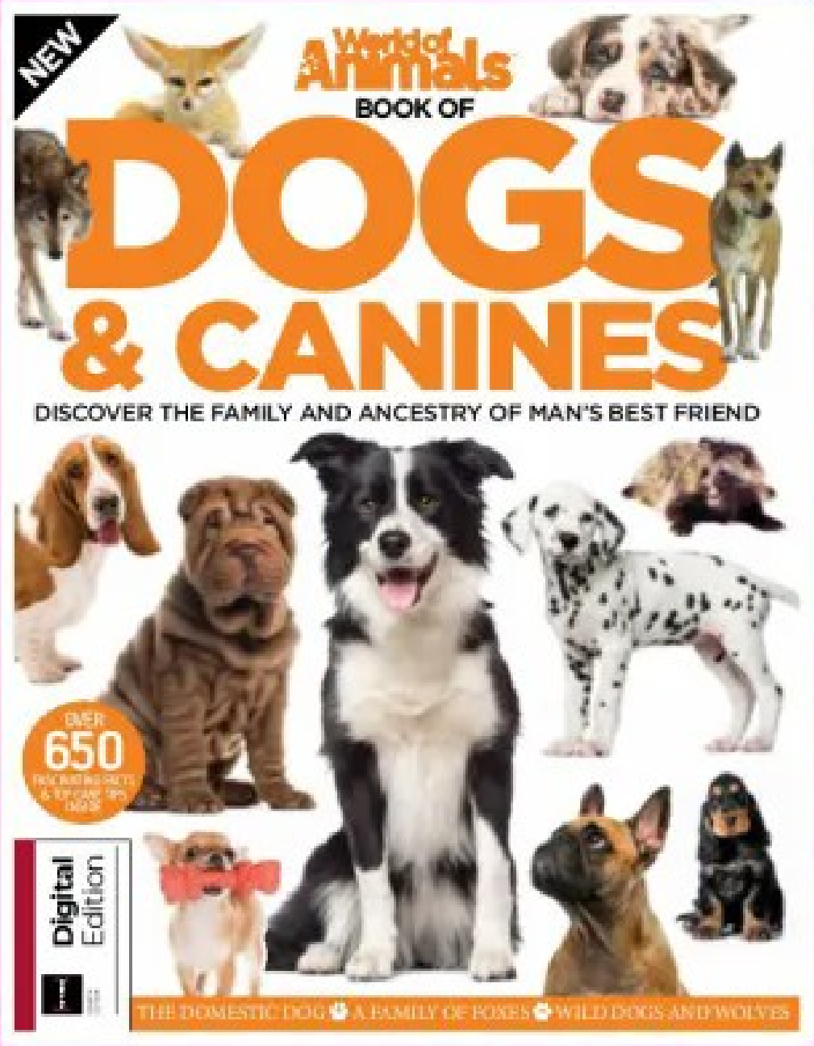
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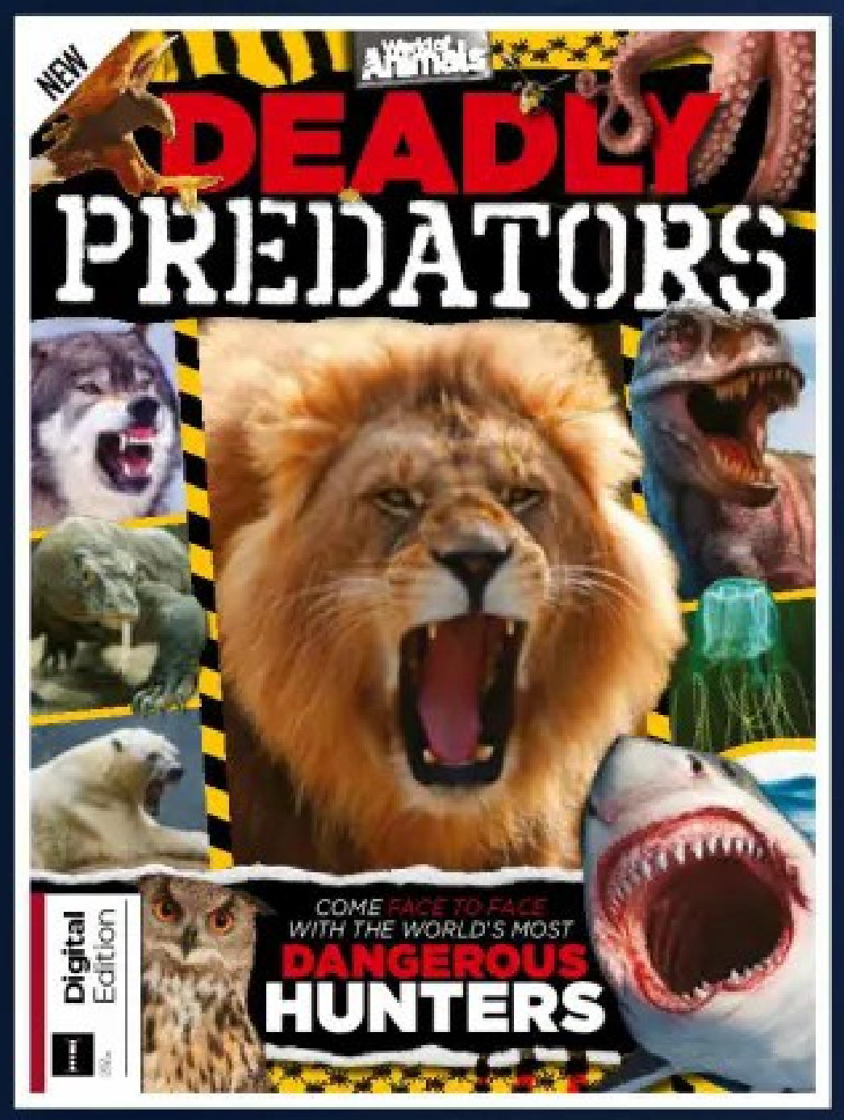
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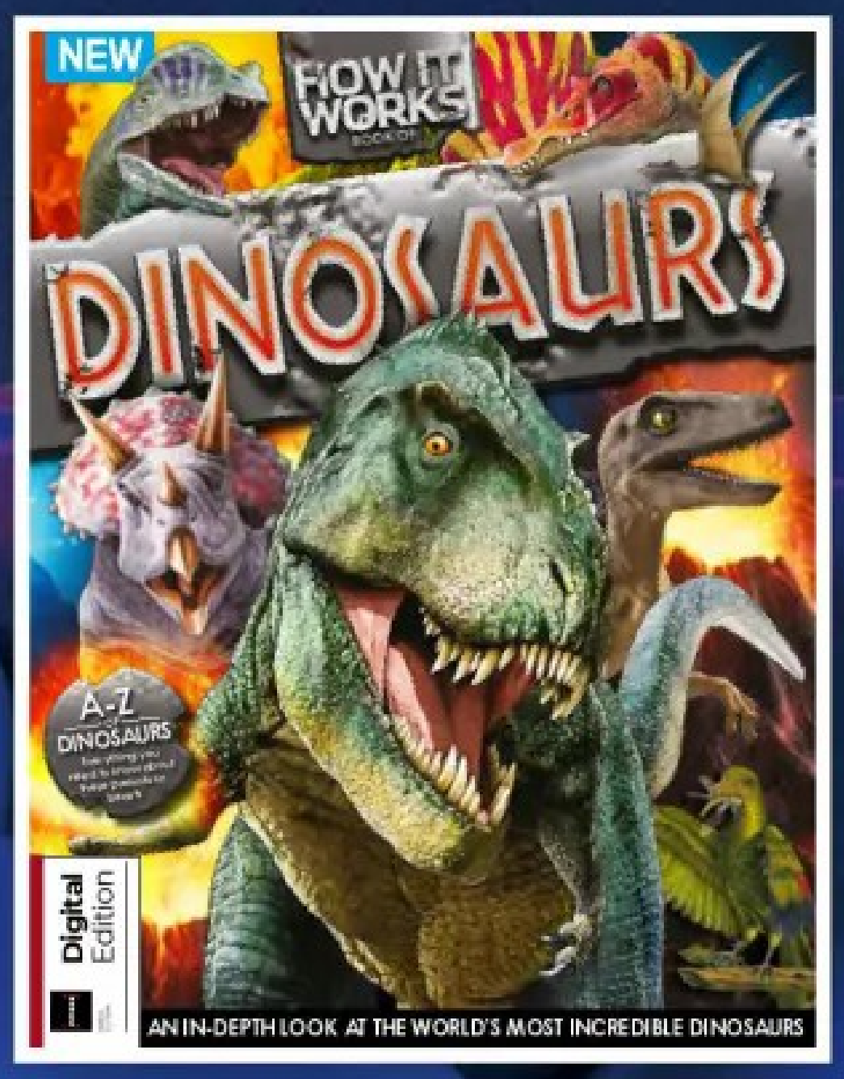

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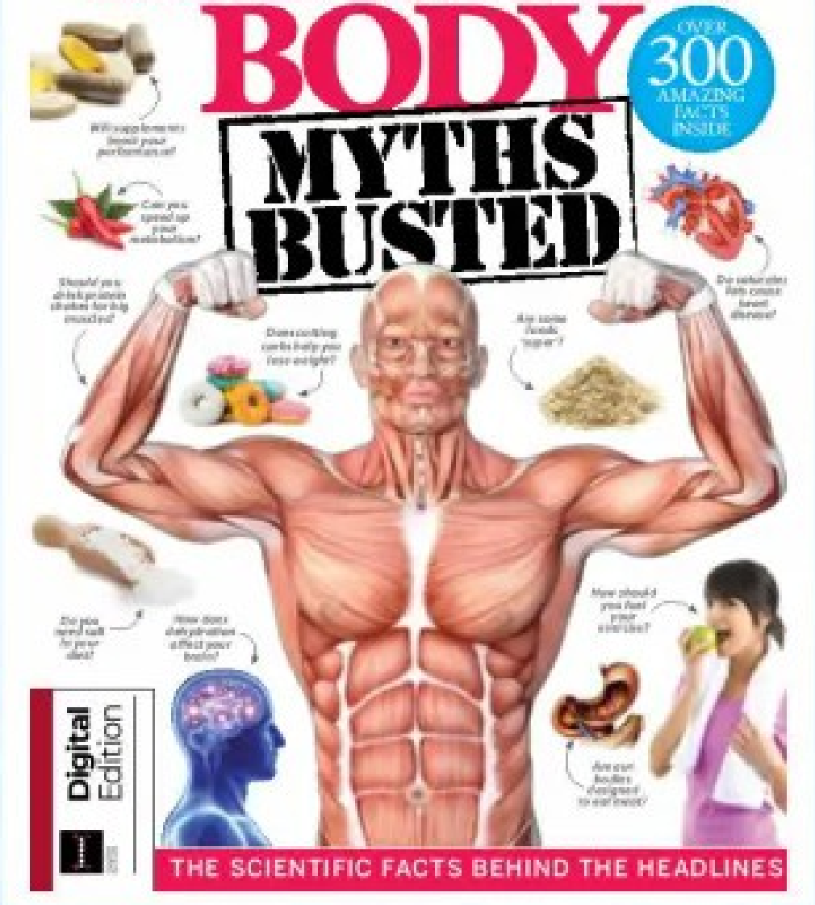
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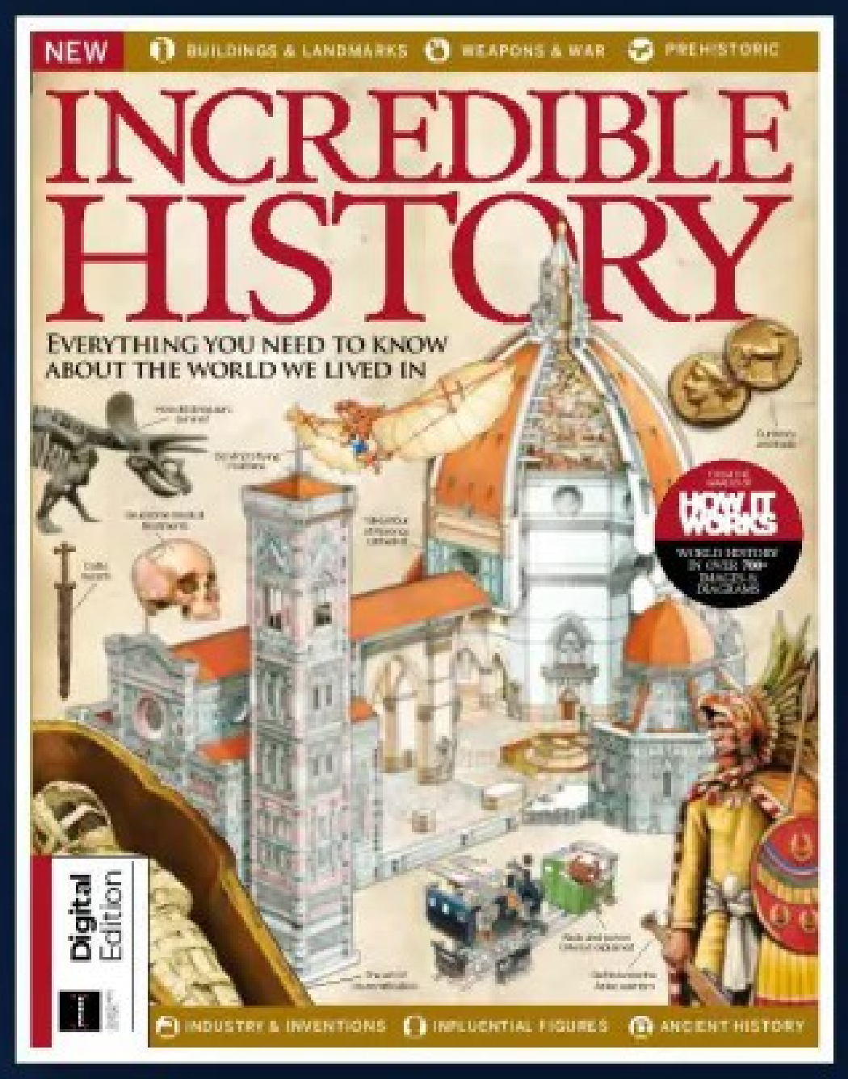
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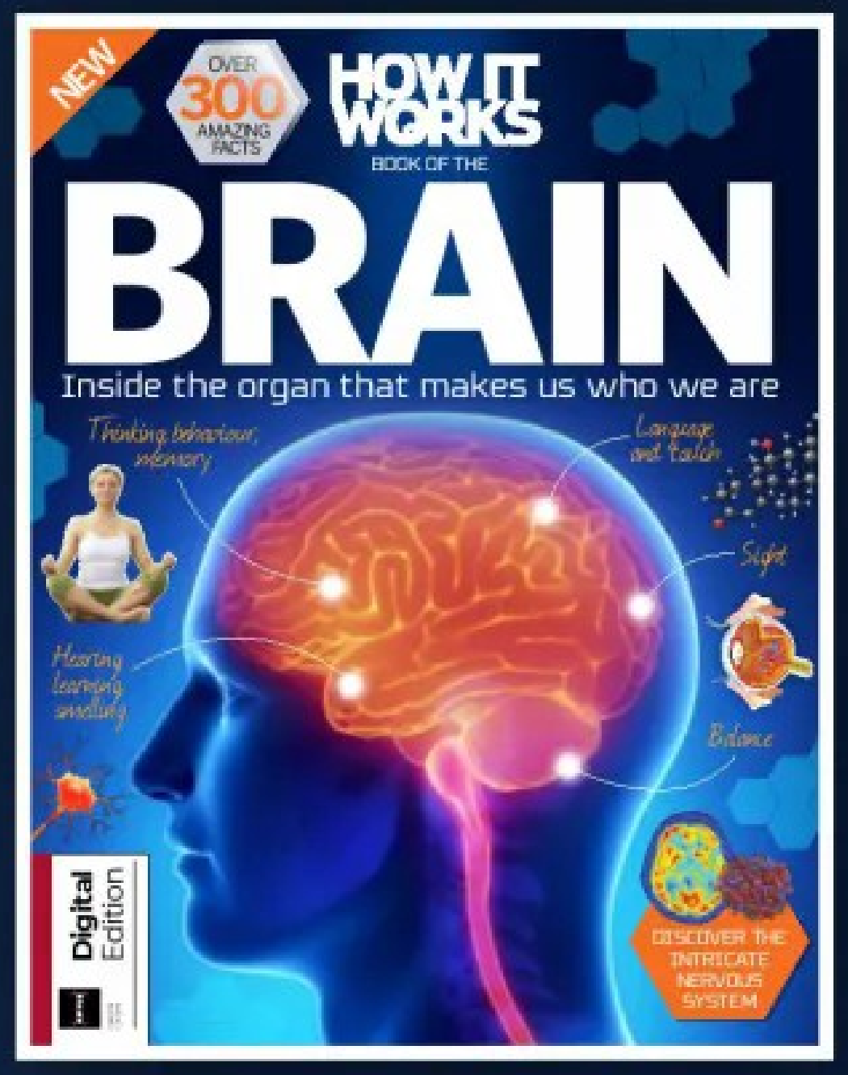

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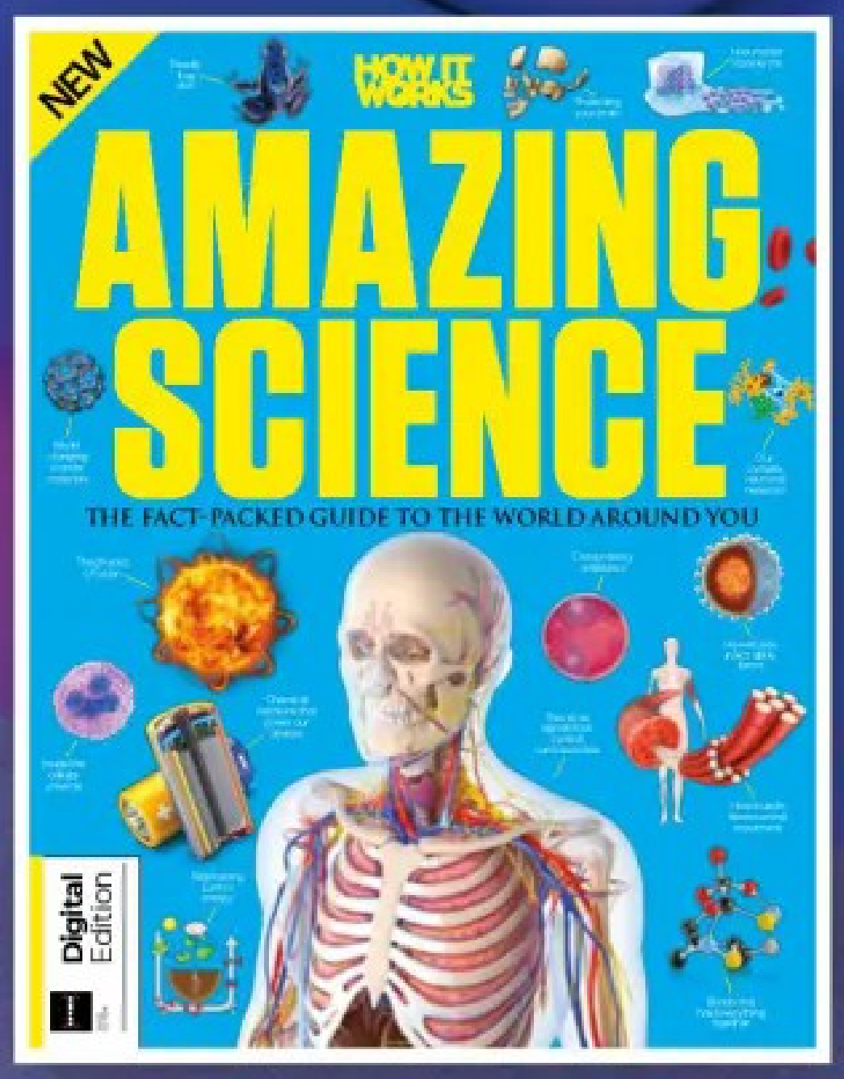
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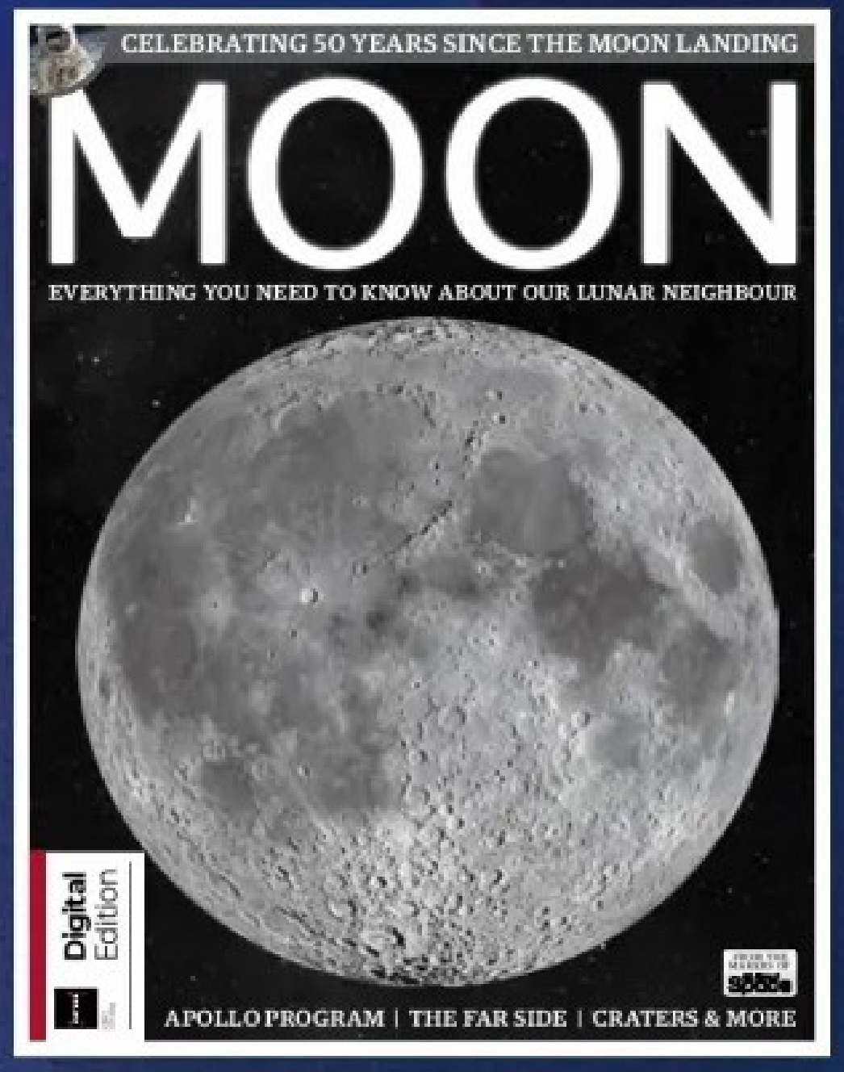

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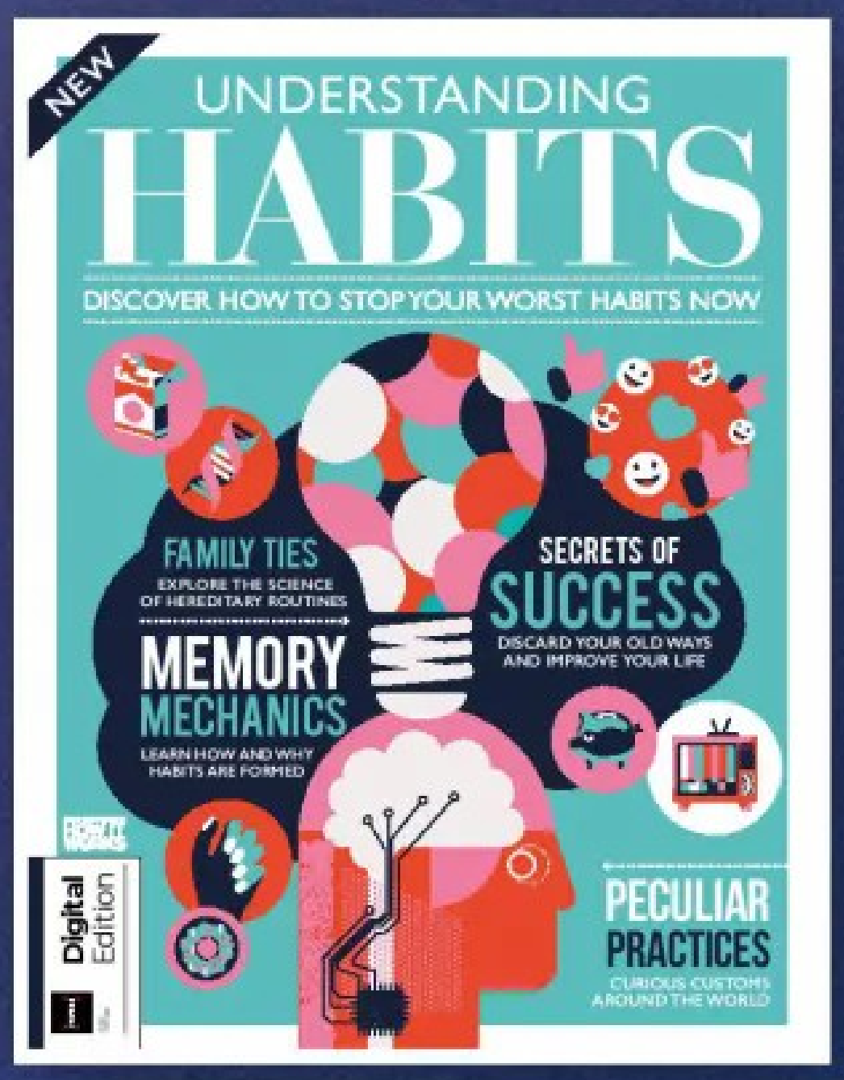
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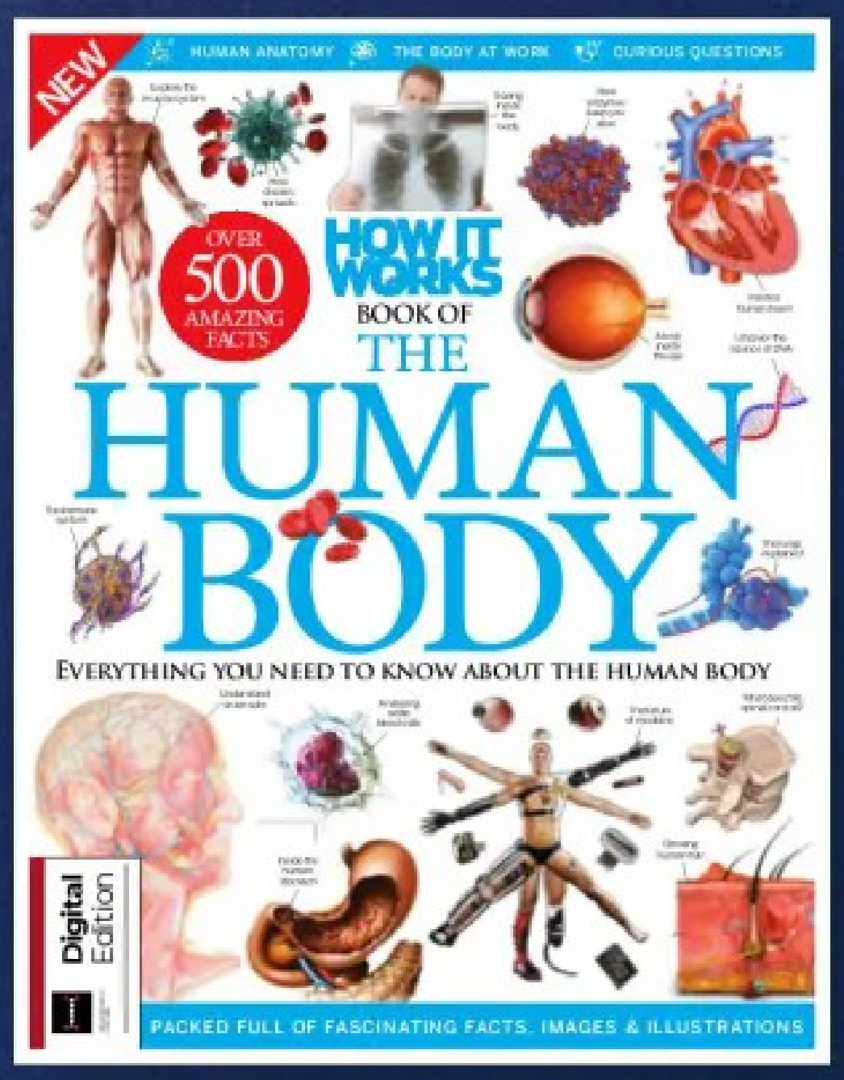
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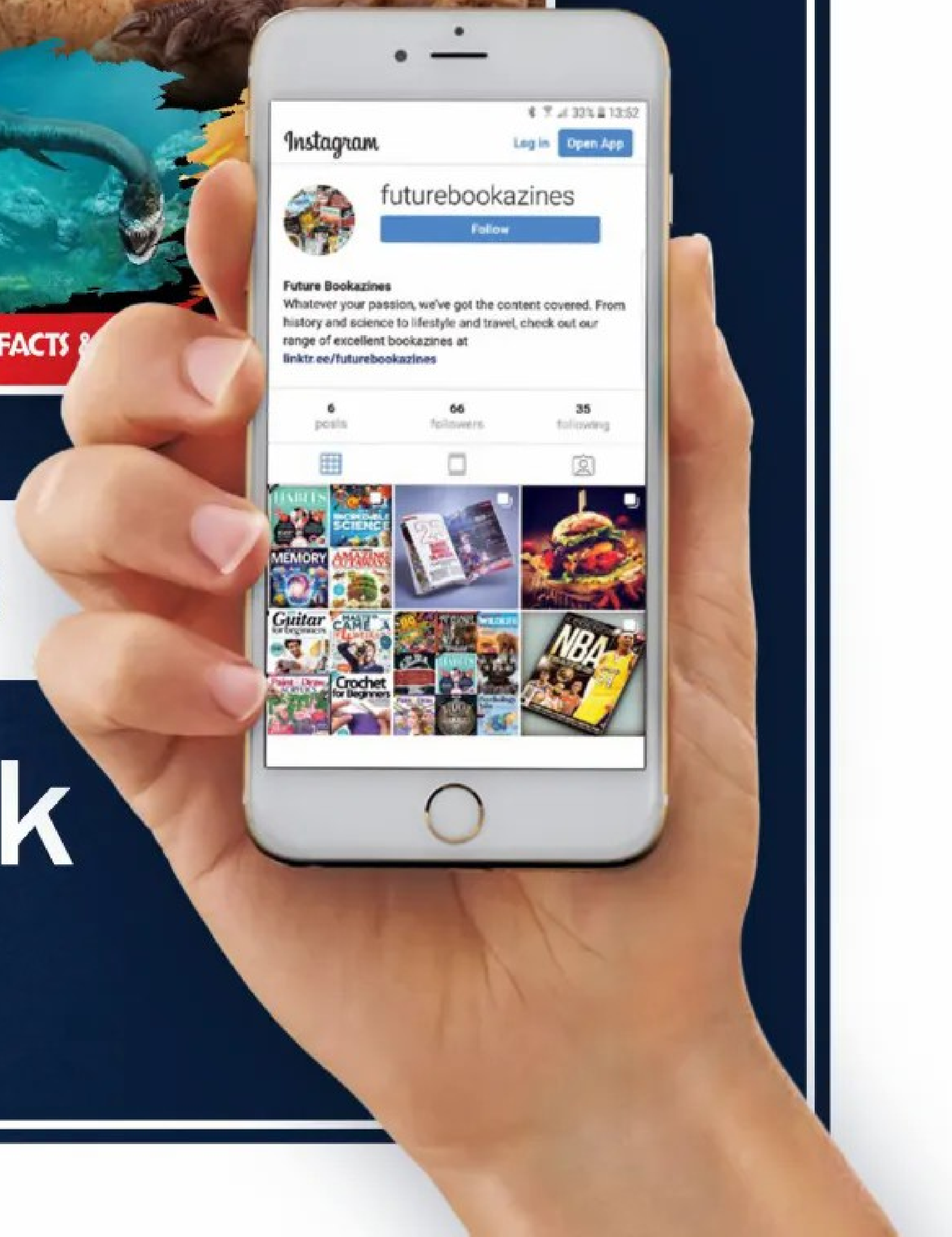

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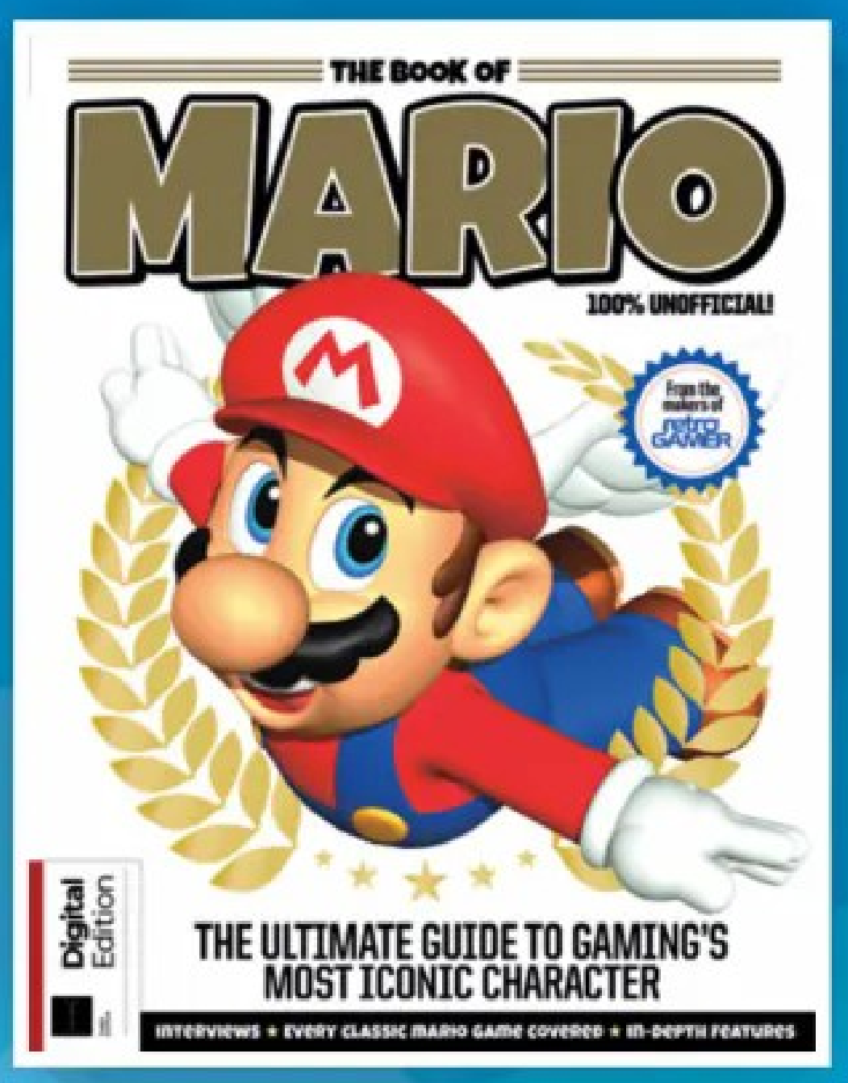

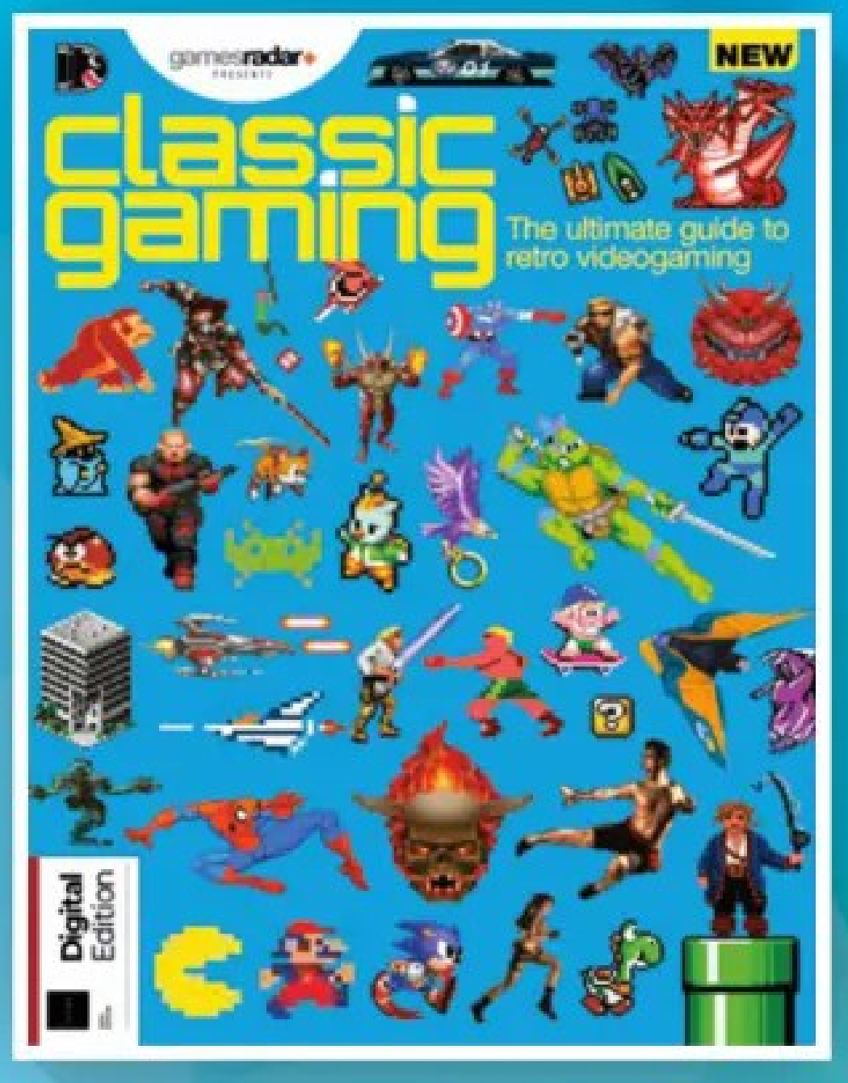

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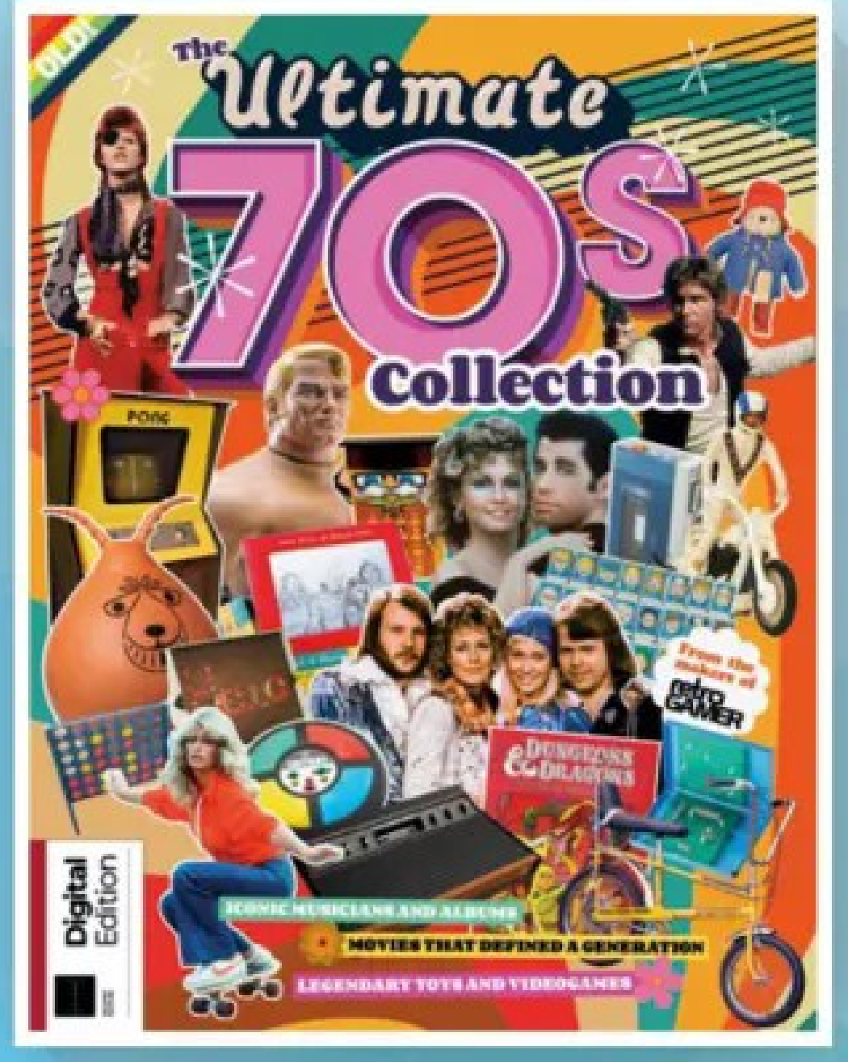

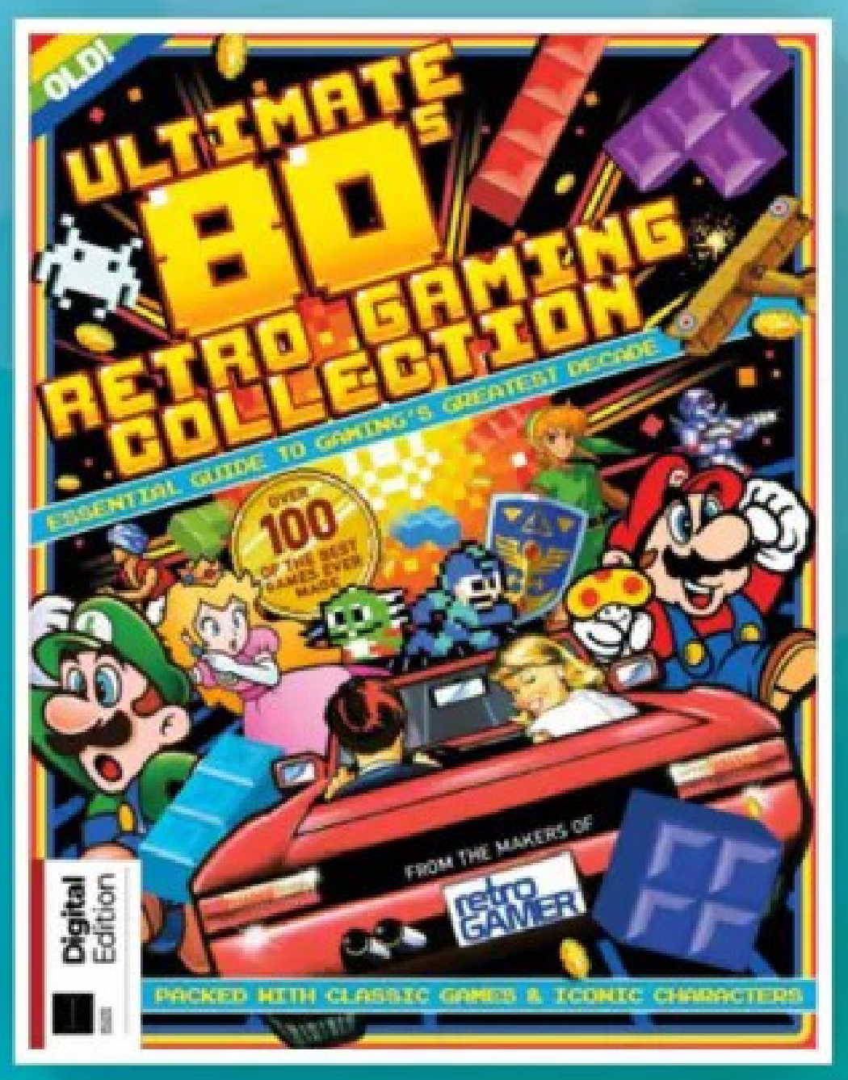
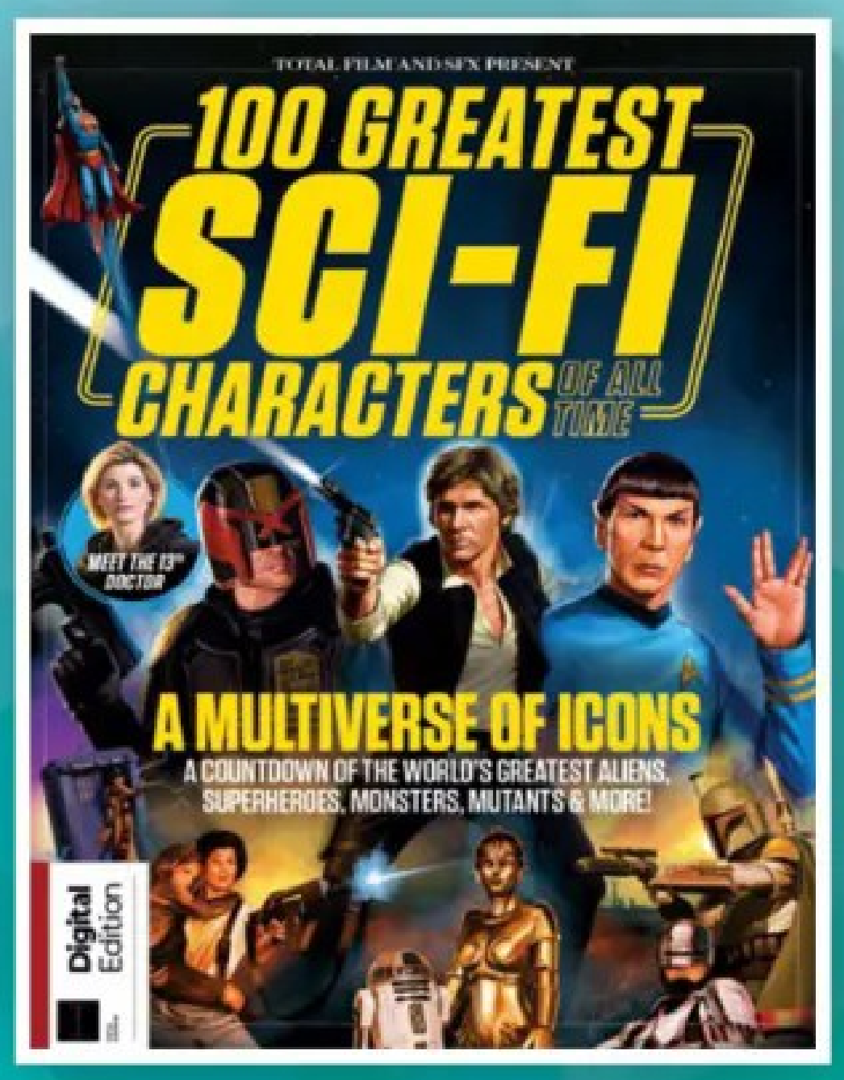

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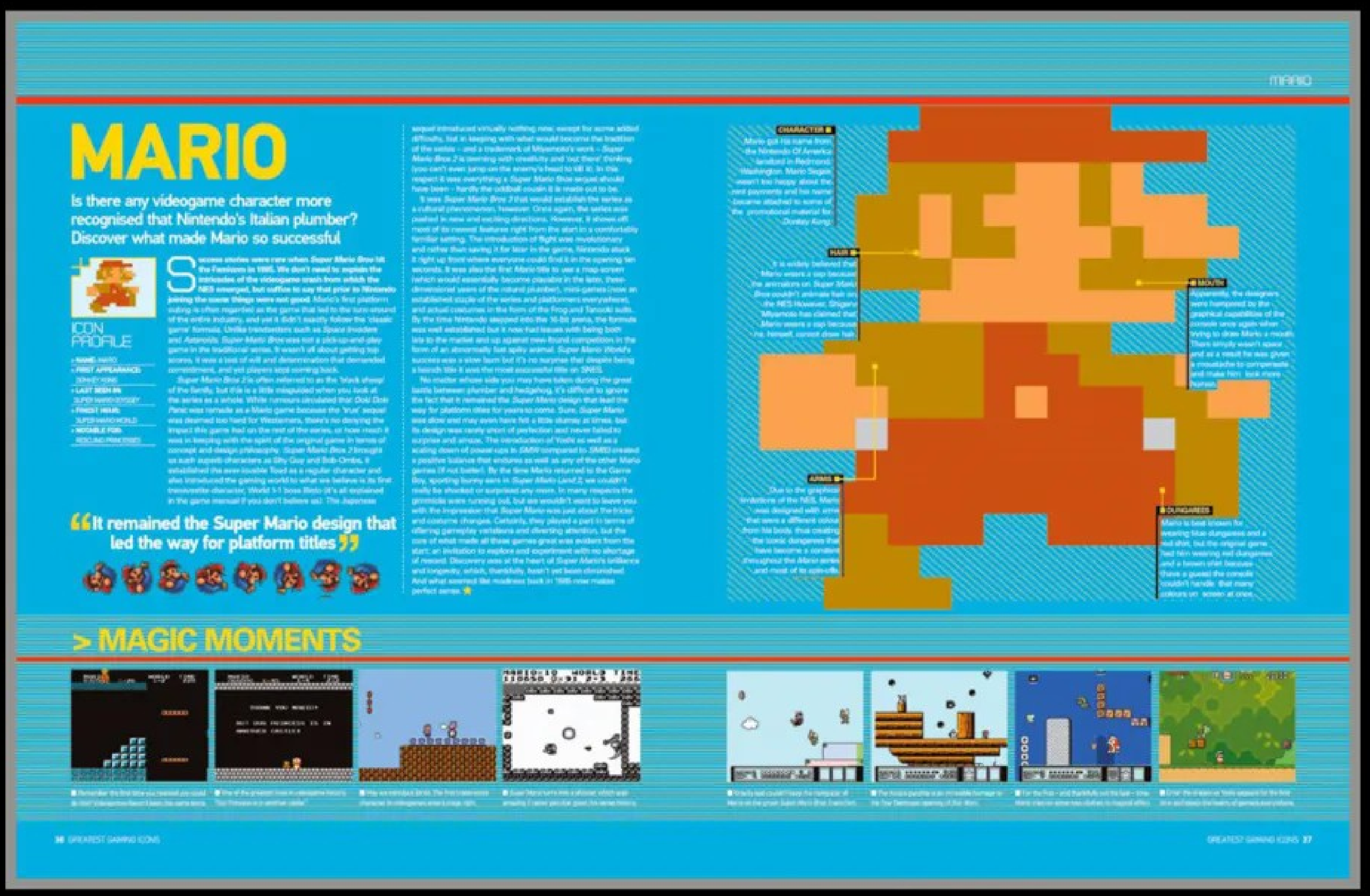
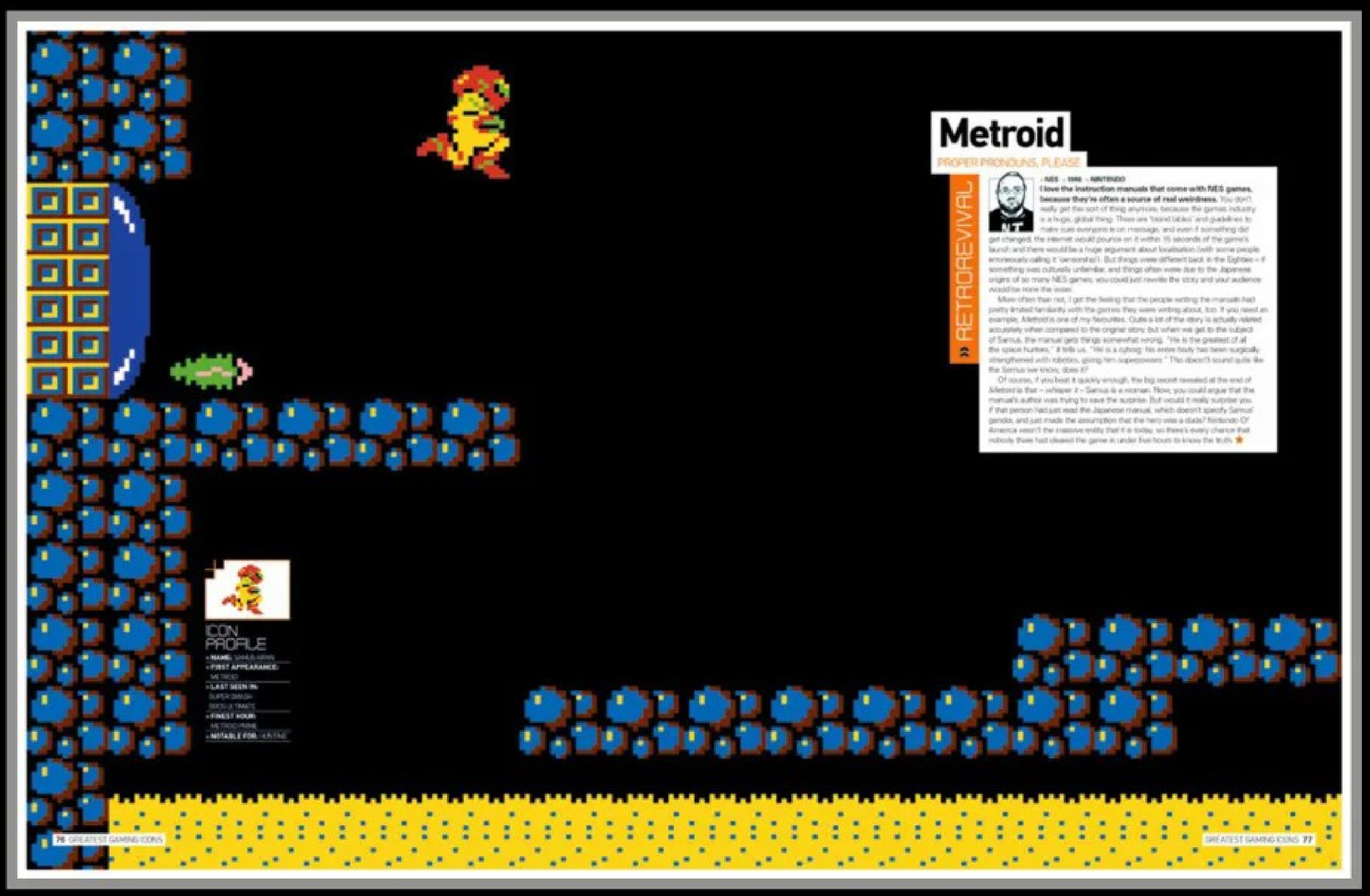


THE ORIGINS OF MARIO

How the popular plumber came to be



RETRO REVIVAL

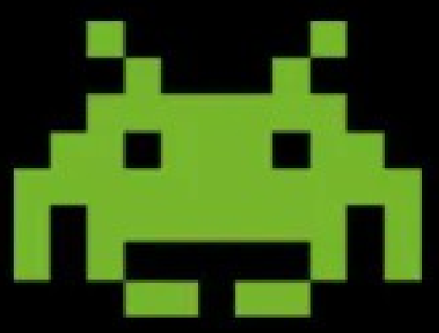
The first games of classic characters

EXPLORE THE GAMES

In-depth information about gaming greats

HALL OF FAME

The stories behind your favourite heroes

BOOKAZINE